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A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S TALK OF  
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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Thesis Presented for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
in the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

February 2009

**ABSTRACT****A Narrative Analysis of Young People's Talk of Intimate Partner Violence  
February 2009**

The aim of this study was to examine the issue of intimate partner violence from the perspective of young adults. My interest was to access participants' stories of partner violence and to tap into their usual ways of thinking and talking about this issue. I wanted to attend to how young women and men actively imparted meaning to themselves and others, and how they constructed and performed their identities through the situated interaction of the research interview. Importantly, I used interactional, performative and narrative-discursive analytical perspectives in order to attend to three aspects of young adults' talk: the content, the language and structure, and the telling as performance and interaction.

Female and male students (with and without first-hand experiences of partner violence) at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, were invited to participate in an individual interview and/or a focus group discussion about intimate partner violence and intimate relationships. This decision to include participants who had not personally experienced partner violence was consistent with the premise that understandings regarding partner violence stem from a range of sources and experiences. A total of 24 young adults volunteered to participate in this study: 15 women and 5 men participated in individual unstructured interviews, and 5 women participated in a focus group. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 24 years, with a mean age of 20.7 years.

The results revealed that both young men and women are knowledgeable and concerned about the issue of intimate partner violence, and that they have a range of first- and second-hand experiences with it: as witnesses to their father's abuse of their mothers, as victims of partner violence in their own intimate relationships, and/or as observers to partner violence in the relationships of their peers. Female and male participants underscored the importance, intensity and timing of intimate relationships in their lives – and signalled the significance and consequence of intimate relationships and partner violence for their current identity projects. Women and men in this study used their narratives as a resource to account for their experiences, negotiate and present their preferred identities, and manage their reputations. Women, in particular, had specific investments in how their talk achieved certain self-presentation goals. Participants in this study used a variety of discursive and linguistic resources to promote understanding and interpretation of their experiences.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my father who passed away in 2006. He was a keen storyteller and scholar, and a loving and supportive father - with whom I was always in dialogue. He inspired and motivated me to do my PhD.

I want to acknowledge and thank the following people who have, in various ways, made a significant contribution to my process of writing this thesis: my mother - for her strength, love and encouragement; my sisters - for their friendship; my wonderful partner, Greg – for waiting patiently for me on the other side of this thesis; my good friend and colleague, Lauraine - with whom I have had many important conversations; Ina – for listening, and helping me to make meaning of the personal and creative process of writing and completing this thesis; colleagues and management in the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health - who were consistently supportive of my research studies; and Prof Alan Flisher – my supervisor - for his invaluable input, thoughtful insights and ongoing guidance over the last five years.

This research study was supported and funded by the Medical Research Council of South Africa.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank the female and male participants in this study who chose to tell me (and others) their stories.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence is a frightening reality that defies our most fundamental and logical assumptions about human relationships. It sees an individual facing violence and abuse within the psychological and physical boundaries of an intimate partner relationship – a relationship that should offer safety, intimacy, love, care and partnership. Intimate partner violence is thus a breach of good faith – and a person is disarmed by the trust that is implicitly assumed and expected in intimate relationships. Furthermore, the ‘private’ nature of intimate relationships often does not allow the abuse to be known and witnessed by others. Hence, intimate partner violence is often a silent and secret experience that remains hidden.

The topic of partner violence has enjoyed a significant amount of attention from researchers, clinicians, the media and legal and social agencies over the last 30 years. As the field of intimate partner violence emerges from its initial fervour, it is important to continue to ask important questions and to stimulate new thinking and perspectives on old issues. As scholars, we need to collaborate with practitioners so that we can better capture the phenomenon we hope to understand, and effectively meet the needs of young people exposed to partner violence (Eisikovits, Grauwiler, Mills, & Winstok, 2008a; Eisikovits, Winstok, Grauwiler, & Mills, 2008b).

In this introductory chapter I briefly attend to the prevalence and definition of intimate partner violence (IPV), and highlight some aspects of a narrative conceptual framework that informed my thesis. I end off with a preview of the chapters to follow, and outline the focus and aims of my current study.

#### **1.1. Prevalence of intimate partner violence**

Violence against women in general, and intimate partner violence in particular, is pervasive and universal (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottmoeller, 2002; WHO, 2002). The WHO estimates that between 16% and 52% of women have been assaulted by an intimate partner, making intimate partner violence (IPV) the most common form of violence against women (WHO, 2002; WHO, 1997). Similarly, Heise and colleagues

(2002) reviewed 50 population-based studies in 36 countries, and showed that between 10% and 60% of ever-married or partnered women had experienced at least one episode of physical violence from an intimate partner. Studies that have explored sexual violence have found that sexual abuse is present in approximately one-third to half the cases of physical abuse by an intimate partner (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999). A large nationally representative US sample of 8,000 women and 8,000 men found that 25% of surveyed women, and 7.6% of surveyed men, reported being raped and/or physically assaulted by a former or current spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some point in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In South Africa, Jewkes (2000) reported that the prevalence of partner abuse amongst women is between 20% and 30%, similar to estimates for many countries. A large-scale, community-based prevalence study undertaken in South Africa confirmed that many women, 18-49 years of age, experience physical, emotional and sexual abuse (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Levin, Ratsaka, & Schrieber, 2001). Specifically, the prevalences of ever having been physically abused by a current or ex-partner ranged from 19.1% to 26.8%, and the prevalence of rape ranged from 4.5% to 7.2% across three different provinces. Considerable emotional and financial abuse was also reported, e.g. the prevalences of a partner having boasted about or having brought home girlfriends in the previous year ranged from 5.0% to 7.0% (Jewkes et al., 2001).

Many studies and analyses of violence against women have been undertaken in Western (Schafer, Caetano, & Cunradi, 2004; Brownridge & Halli, 2002), as well as non-Western societies (Amoakohene, 2004; Hindin & Adair, 2002; Farred, 2002; Haj-Yahia, 2002; Aidoo & Harpham, 2001; Avotri & Walters, 2001; Jewkes, 2001).

Internationally, the literature shows that IPV does not observe any racial, educational, class or economic distinctions but cuts across societies and cultures (Amoakohene, 2004).

Intimate partner violence is both a violation of human rights and a health problem with profound and potentially devastating consequences (Thomas, Joshi, Wittenberg, & McCloskey, 2008; Heise et al., 2002; WHO, 2002). The physical and mental health impact of violence against women has been the subject of many studies. For instance, women who have experienced IPV have been shown to suffer from long-term psychological reactions, such as PTSD and depression (Scheffer & Renck, 2008; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2008; Marais, de Villiers, Möller, & Stein, 1999). The

linkage between violence and the spread of HIV infection has also gained increased attention (Campbell et al., 2008; Gruskin et al., 2002; Maman et al., 2002; McCallum, Arnold, & Bolland, 2002; WHO, 2002; Avotri & Walters, 2001; Jewkes, 2001; Jewkes, 2000; Maman, Campbell, Sweat, & Gielen, 2000; Watts, Ndlovu, Njovana, & Keogh, 1997; WHO, 1997).

In recent years, the focus has increasingly shifted towards adolescents and youth as being especially vulnerable to violence, including violence within their intimate relationships. Adolescence is typically a stage of development in which primary affective ties shift from family members to peers and romantic partners (Hazen & Shaver, 1994). Dating and romantic relationships are typically initiated and formed during this time (Foshee et al., 1998; Feiring, 1996), and often involve sexual initiation and sexual activity. Research in developed countries has shown that a large percentage of these relationships involve some form of ‘dating violence’, including emotional and verbal aggression (intimidating, teasing, insults), physical aggression (pushing, slapping), and sexual coercion (forced sexual touching and/or intercourse, unwanted kissing) (Livingston, Hequembourg, Testa, & Vanzile-Tamsen, 2007; Wekerle & Avgoustis, 2003). In the last decade, research in developing countries has confirmed that many adolescents experience sexual coercion, often by their intimate partners (Serquina-Ramiro, 2005; Hulton, Cullen, & Khalokho, 2000; Wood & Jewkes, 1998a; Wood, Maforah, & Jewkes, 1998b; Wood & Jewkes, 1997). This is significant, since it has been shown that involvement in, and exposure to, violent behaviour and sexual coercion in early relationships can lead to increasing levels of violence and sexual risk in later ones (Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992).

## **1.2. Definition of intimate partner violence**

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private” (cited in Amoakohene, 2004, p.2374). Other definitions of violence in general associate the element of intentionality with the act of violence, irrespective of its outcome. For instance, the World Health Organisation (WHO) report on violence and health defines violence as the “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or

actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (WHO, 2002, cited in Amoakohene, 2004).

In this thesis I define intimate partner violence (IPV) as the actual or threatened abuse (physical, sexual, and/or emotional) directed toward a spouse, ex-spouse, current or former boyfriend or girlfriend, or current or former dating partner. Intimate partner violence involves a myriad of behaviours that people use to control, intimidate and otherwise dominate another person in the context of an intimate relationship. Some of the common terms used to describe intimate partner violence have been domestic abuse, spouse abuse, domestic violence, courtship violence, dating violence, battering, marital rape, and date rape (Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, & Shelley, 1999). The National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control and the Center for Disease Control (2000) use the term ‘intimate partner violence’ because it describes violence that occurs within intimate relationships specifically. Some of the other terms, such as ‘domestic violence’, are overlapping and can also refer to the violence perpetrated by other family members and relatives.

Intimate partner violence is thus the intentional violation of a person’s physical, emotional and/or sexual well-being, which manifests in various forms – it is perpetrated by intimate partners who have either promised to love the person through commitment pledges, and who are expected to love and care for them.

In this thesis my preferred terminology for referring to people in IPV relationships is ‘abused women’ and ‘abused men’. However, I adopt the terminology used by other authors when referring specifically to their work. For instance, many authors use the terms ‘battering’ in speaking about IPV.

### **1.3. The place of gender in intimate partner violence**

It is important to consider the issue of gender in how one makes meaning of IPV. For the most part (and as illustrated above in the brief discussion of the prevalence and definition of IPV), researchers, legislators, policy makers, legal and social service professionals and community advocates have dealt with the issue of IPV as primarily a problem of men’s violence against a female partner. Accordingly, almost all services

and programmes are designed to deal with the serious problem of male violence against an intimate female partner, and not the obverse (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). However, debate continues concerning whether and how gender shapes partner violence. Some researchers suggest a gender neutral approach is warranted (Straus, 2008), whereas others insist that gender - and male dominance specifically - must be at the foreground for a meaningful understanding of relationship violence to emerge (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 1998; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992).

In certain cases where women have used violence against their male partner, the women's violence differed from that perpetrated by men in terms of nature, frequency, intention, intensity, physical injury and emotional impact (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Men's violence has also been associated with a 'constellation of abuse' that includes a variety of additional intimidating and controlling acts (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 2000). In terms of consequences of violence, it has been shown that women experience significantly more negative effects from partner violence than men (Jackson, Cram, & Seymour, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Molidor & Tolman, 1998; Vivan & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994). Women have been found to be more likely to report physical injuries, and emotional and psychological side-effects, such as fear, depression and anxiety, as a result of men's violence towards them (Dobash & Dobash, 2001).

In a recent issue on trends in intimate violence, Straus (2008) presents results from the International Dating Violence Study that involved a sample of university students from 32 nations. The results from various acts-questionnaires showed that the most frequent pattern of physical partner violence was bidirectional, followed by 'female-only' violence. Importantly, critics have noted that the exact nature, sequence and consequences of any 'act', as well as the motivations and intentions associated with the 'act', cannot be assessed solely from the knowledge that it occurred. Rather, women's violence should be studied within the context of actions and intentions associated with the event and its aftermath (Dobash & Dobash, 2004).

Nevertheless, Straus (2008) makes a valid point: he argues that a single causal "patriarchal system" based model of partner violence has to be replaced with a multi-causal one, and that instead of considering male dominance as the major risk factor, it would be important to acknowledge dominance by either party in a relationship as one of many risk factors that need attention. From this perspective, "it is possible to move

beyond a narrow definition of “patriarchal” as literally male-dominated, to a recognition that the history of patriarchy has taught both men and women the message of the domination of some by others. Dominance can be viewed as a gendered, i.e. masculine, attribute without necessarily being the domain of only men” (Eisikovits et al., 2008b, p.249).

Recent authors have also argued that researchers should focus on both men and women’s constructions of their relationships in order to better understand the relational construction and basis of IPV (Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008; Boonzaier, 2008), as well as the interactional context of conflict escalation (Winstok & Eisikovits, 2008). Qualitative studies that have considered the perspectives of both partners in a dyad afford opportunities to examine how individual partners’ narratives are constructed in relation to the other partner (Allison et al., 2008; Boonzaier, 2008; Winstok & Eisikovits, 2008; Rosen, Stith, Few, Daly, & Tritt, 2005; Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a; Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b; Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002; Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999; Rosen & Bird, 1996). Findings have indicated that both partners’ motivation and control elements regulate the developmental course of the escalatory conflict (Winstok & Eisikovits, 2008). From this standpoint, conflicts are examined as occurring between intimate partners rather than gender representatives (Eisikovits et al., 2008b). As argued by these authors, the complex and dynamic nature of human relationships must not be lost in the debates surrounding intimate partner violence (Eisikovits et al., 2008a), and research must allow for the complexities and paradoxes in narratives of IPV to emerge.

In this study, I am interested in how both young women and men talk about their experiences and knowledges of partner violence. However, throughout my thesis, I am aware of making a lot of reference to intimate partner violence where the woman is positioned as the ‘abused’ person, and the man as the ‘abuser’. I do this mostly for discursive reasons, but it’s also largely due to the fact that most research has been done on women as the ‘victims’ of ‘battering’ or abuse. Certainly, in my clinical work as a psychologist I have had more interaction and dialogue with women who were experiencing abuse by their intimate partners. However, I certainly believe and acknowledge that men are - and can also be - ‘victims’ of IPV, and that partner violence can be both a male and female experience.



#### **1.4. Intimate partner violence and young adults**

Most of IPV research has focused on adult women, and in recent years, younger adolescents. Less is known about how young female and male adults, in particular, interpret their experiences of intimate relationships and IPV, and what their particular ascriptions of meaning are. Narrative research encourages the development of a knowledge base that privileges dialogue amongst researchers and practitioners. It would seem important that all practitioners who work with young adults have a better understanding of how young women and men think and talk about IPV. One of the values of narrative analytic studies is that a better understanding of meaning-making can offer suggestions of how people may act on their social constructions or their experiences of a particular position. The aim is to attend to suggested consequences of the interpretive reality (Josselson, 2006).

In my study, I conceptualised young adults as knowledgeable informants who could tell me (and others) about their perspectives of IPV, and who had the skills to adequately communicate with thoughtful and reflective competence about their lives. As encouraged by Biklen (2004), I consciously paid attention to the participants' legitimacy, expertise and authority as interpreters of their own experience, and I was curious and respectful of how they articulated their lives and identities.

Due to the ongoing nature of intimate partner violence I did expect that the stories of some of the participants would relate back to, or include, their experiences and understandings of relationships in their school/adolescent years. Therefore, by interviewing young adults, I hoped to capture retrospective stories that would elucidate how young adults had processed and made sense of their relationships and experiences over a period of time.

#### **1.5. Intimate partner violence and narrative**

In this section I highlight some aspects of the narrative framework that conceptually informed my thesis. Here I consider the following: choosing a narrative approach for my study; the importance and relational potential of narrative, and the transformative power and healing effects of narrative. These perspectives contributed to my decisions

regarding the methodology and methods of data collection and analysis in this study (which I'll discuss in detail in Chapter 3).

### ***1.5.1. Choosing a narrative approach for my study***

I chose a narrative methodological framework for my study for several reasons (which I further elaborate on in Chapter 3). As a narrative therapist, I value the importance of personal narratives and meaning-making, and therefore felt attuned to a research approach that would consider narratives as primary data. Because of its epistemological commitment to a more democratised research agenda (Smyth & Hattam, 2001), I felt encouraged that narrative research would provide a respectful space in which participants could reveal what was important and authentic to them. Narrative research has been acknowledged as providing opportunities for expression – which can bring into existence perspectives previously excluded, muted, or silenced by dominant structures and discourses (Smyth & Hattam, 2001).

In addition, narrative analytic approaches have been noted to give prominence to human agency and imagination, and to be well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity (Riessman, 1993). Narrative research methods have been found to be useful in projects that explore extremely sensitive issues with complex layers of meaning (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004; Chaitin, 2003). I therefore felt a narrative approach was appropriate for my study that focused on how young adults made meaning – and constructed their identities - through their talk of intimate relationships and partner violence.

In the past, I have conducted qualitative research using thematic content analysis methods only; however, in recent years I have developed a keen interest in narrative research methodology. A highlight was when I attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tampere Conference on Narrative: Knowing, Living, Telling – held in Tampere, Finland in June 2007. Here I had my first opportunity to listen to - and engage in dialogue with - researchers and practitioners who were well-versed in the field of narrative analysis. I recall being very conscious of the safe discursive spaces created by the conference – despite being a novice, I felt encouraged to voice and explore my understandings, and to position myself in relation to my comments. My work on this thesis has afforded me the opportunity to immerse myself in this 'new' and exciting world of 'narrative analysis', and I've learnt the importance of systematically analysing the narratives I construct with the participants in my research studies.

### ***1.5.2. The importance of narrative***

A primary way individuals make sense of experience (especially difficult events) is by casting it in narrative form. Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives (Riessman, 1993). Lawless (2001) argues that narrative has purpose, and that to tell our stories is to re-create our selves. As Lawless states (2001, p.106), “the act of telling a story is a creative act, a kind of performance, that takes words and language beyond their mere rhetorical power and enables them to work for the narrator toward transformation and self-representation”. It is as we share our personal stories with others that they take on coherence and meaning and become part of our individual life story. Through reminiscing about our past with others we come to reconstruct and redefine both our experiences and ourselves (Fivush, 2003).

Narratives therefore link our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience, or make meaning of it (Riessman, 1987) - it is through narratives that we “translate knowing into telling” (White, 1981, cited in Riessman, 1987). The story metaphor emphasises that we create order, construct texts in particular contexts. Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the narrative itself; the focus is on examining how a narrative is constructed and how a teller rhetorically creates it to make particular points (Riessman, 1993).

Narrative analysis approaches give attention to language and its role in constructing meaning - how people say what they do and who they are, and the narrative structures they employ to construct experience by telling it. Furthermore, given that narrative analysis focuses on the ‘how’ of lived experience, and not the causal ‘why’, analysis is framed interactionally and attempts to unravel the multiple meanings that derive from interactional events while simultaneously seeking to examine the social text presented in the personal narrative (Lempert, 1994). The narrative researcher thus attends to how individuals talk about, and construct, their experience, through the use of language in interaction, and how this focus adds to our attempts to understand the experience.

### ***1.5.3. Using narrative to make a relational claim***

It is important to consider the place of narrative in the context of intimate relationships and intimate partner violence. Couples in conflict often struggle over meaning, and fight over competing narratives, each trying to assert the right to define and describe the

couple's reality (Fishbane, 2001). In a relational model of psychological development, disconnection from others is viewed as one of the primary sources of human suffering. Similarly, disconnection from oneself creates distress, inauthenticity, and isolation (Fishbane, 2001). An abusive intimate relationship can destroy a person's ability to maintain connections with both oneself and the other; the abused person must often disconnect from self in order to connect with the other. Within this disconnected and dangerous attachment of intimate partner violence narrative possibility is frozen. For example, an abused woman cannot become curious about her experience; she cannot claim her own narrative – she struggles over meaning-making, and is not allowed power in constructing a shared narrative of the relationship (Fishbane, 2001).

It is here where a narrative interview can explore and transform the participant's relational narrative of self. Storytelling is a relational activity that invites others to listen and empathise; it is a collaborative practice, and assumes tellers and listeners interact in a particular cultural milieu essential to interpretation (Riessman, 2001). The act of telling her story can thus provide an abused woman with an opportunity to make a relational claim and to have a voice in naming her experience and reality; this is a central aspect of personal empowerment. The careful and active listening of the researcher can therefore assist participants to regain their clarity of voice, and to reclaim their power in the meaning-making and constructions of their preferred narratives of self.

#### ***1.5.4. The transformative power of narrative***

Those who are given voice are given the authority to tell the story from their perspective, thus, some versions of truth become privileged over others. In this way, voice is a form of power. In addition, changing political and social contexts determine what is allowed to be voiced and what is silenced (Fivush, 2003).

Abuse is a category of events that is often silenced in the most basic terms. Often an abused person's words do not carry weight when used to confront the perpetrator of violence; in fact, the perpetrator's power lies in his ability to keep her silent. In addition, not only are individual stories often not heard, but an individual's culture or family as a whole may also conspire to erase these kinds of experiences from the person's cultural landscape of possible experiences. Traumatic events, especially abuse, may thus be

silenced both by others and by the self as too dangerous to think or talk about (Fivush, 2003).

The issue of intimate partner violence has in recent years been allowed to surface, and narrative research approaches have been shown to be a useful and empowering means of exploring it. People living with intimate partner violence must come to tell their story to someone; how they tell and create their story will have a significant effect on their lives. Lawless (2001) has shown how abused women can “do things with words”, and suggests that we think about words as transformative, i.e. grounded in language use lies the transformative power and possibility of change. Lawless (2000) talks about the kinds of re-membering that women do, rather than talk about memory as a fixed entity. She refers to a process of ‘transformative re-membering’, which refers to the creative use of the past in redefining the self.

#### ***1.5.5. The healing effects of narrative***

Many social researchers assume that qualitative or open research interviews cannot trigger processes of change in the interviewees. Rosenthal (2003) makes an argument for narration’s curative chances for coming to an understanding of oneself. She rejects the “naïve” notion that in qualitative social research we should and would avoid interventions, claiming that it shows a lack of sensitivity for the processes in an interview with an open method for guiding a conversation.

In telling about experience, we interact with our memories (not just with the listener), and also construct explanations regarding what we experienced directed at the listener. Through the experience of narrating, participants can already gain insights into their lives, which can lead to a modification or reorganisation of their view of the experience. The narrator can attend to tendencies in his/her presentation, and can then begin to look for other experiences, or unique outcomes, in their memory. In this way a person can begin to narrate their experiences in different ways, against different backdrops (Rosenthal, 2003).

Some survivors of trauma are convinced that there’s no way to translate between the world of destruction and their world today. It is here that narrating can establish a connection between both worlds for them. By directly asking them to narrate, they

realise how, contrary to their fears, what cannot be openly talked about can be put into language and thereby becomes communicable and real (Rosenthal, 2003).

The role of the interviewer is often to support the interviewee to reconstruct remembered fragments into a story and to narrate their way out of burdensome situations and life phases. Asking questions can give the interviewee the feeling that they can remember (Rosenthal, 2003). Furthermore, by reflecting on and narrating certain experiences more explicitly, an individual can work towards an integrated sense of identity. In her diary reflections of her experiences with 'abuse', Carter (2002) shows how writing, or telling one's story, can offer opportunities to maintain a sense of self: "I need to have some sort of point of reflection where I can reaffirm myself as a person; a place where I can re-find myself and reconnect with the person that I am" (Carter, 2002, p.1187).

In summary, individuals narrativise particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society (Riessman, 1993). Narratives assist individuals to make sense of difficult life transitions and trauma. As both modes of reasoning and modes of representation (Richardson, 1990), narratives can be used as linguistic tools that serve to order experiences, construct reality, and creatively make sense of violent intimate relationships. Through narrative constructions, abused women have been shown to reflect on retrospective assessments of their intimate situations and their partners' violent actions, their own rationales for action and/or inaction, as well as the continuous erosions in notions of self resulting from the ongoing physical and/or psychological violence (Lempert, 1994). Through their narrations, abused people contextualise the experiences of violence and explain their choices to themselves and others.

However, as mentioned earlier, some experiences are extremely difficult to talk about, and survivors of abuse often silence themselves and are silenced because it is too difficult to tell and to listen (Herman, 1992). Women may have difficulty even naming their experience of abuse. Rosenthal (2003) argues that traumatised people's inability to speak cannot only be seen as the primary consequence of traumatisation; it also comes from others' need to forget and to not have to deal with the pain involved in encountering survivors of violence. Participants are afraid of the process of putting difficult experiences into language, and they fear a lack of understanding on the

listeners' part. It is therefore very important that we as interviewers be ready to want to hear and understand narrations about violent experiences (Rosenthal, 2003).

### **1.6. Writing in the first person**

In line with my narrative research framework, and in order to emphasise reflexivity and the positioning of myself as researcher in the research process (Mantzoukas, 2004; Fawcett & Hearn, 2004), I have chosen to write in the first-person. Throughout the thesis I make conscious attempts to be transparent about my constitutive and authoring role - by doing so, I underscore the context and interaction in which the participants' talk takes place, and represent myself as researcher in the research text.

### **1.7. Focus and aims of current study**

My research study provides a narrative analysis of the talk-in-interaction of young women and men with regards to intimate partner violence and intimate relationships. It uses interactional, performative and narrative-discursive analytical perspectives to address the following questions about young adults:

- 1) *Attending to content:* When invited to talk about intimate relationships and intimate partner violence, what do young adults make their talk about? What are their definitions, interpretations and explanations of IPV? What do they say about the nature, meaning and impact of intimate relationships and IPV? Which discursive resources do young adults invoke in their talk about IPV and intimate relationships?
- 2) *Attending to language and structure:* What narrative or grammatical structures and word choices do participants use in order to promote understanding and interpretation of their experiences and to uncover meanings?
- 3) *Attending to the telling moment as performance and interaction:* What are young adults' self-presentation and interactional goals in talking about IPV in particular ways in the context of the research interview? How do they manage, perform and negotiate their identity work in their talk of IPV and intimate relationships?

## 1.8. Preview of chapters

In Chapter 2 I outline the process and results of the systematic literature search I conducted into qualitative research into IPV. The literature search was aimed at identifying any qualitative research using first person accounts of abused men/women as participants regarding their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV), or accounts of men/women about their perceptions and knowledges of IPV. The main body of the chapter is organised around the focus areas or thematic categories identified across the studies in the literature search. Each focus area is comprehensively discussed, and where relevant, the qualitative methodological approaches used are critiqued.

In Chapter 3 I present the epistemological, methodological and analytical frameworks of my study: the epistemological background clarifies my ways of working and positioning myself as researcher in this study; and the methodological framework attends to the central values and assumptions inherent in the knowledge-claims I make in this study. This chapter also includes a discussion of the theory and methods of my data creation (using unstructured interactive interviews), as well as the theory, methods and analytical framework of my narrative analysis (using an interactional, performative and narrative-discursive research approach).

In Chapter 4 I present and discuss the results of my research study. In line with my study's objectives and methodological framework, and in an attempt to provide some structure, my results are organised along the following lines: attending to *content*; attending to *structure*; and attending to *the telling moment*. In this chapter I present detailed extracts from the research interviews (and one focus group). My interest here is to employ an interpretive thrust of narrative analysis (Lempert, 1994) by looking at how participants make sense of - and talk about - things, and how as researcher I can systematically go about interpreting their interpretations. The presentation of detailed extracts is also aimed at allowing for possible alternative readings.

I end off with my conclusions in Chapter 5 where I highlight the central findings from this study and make recommendations as to how these particular understandings, perspectives and interpretations can inform the focus of future research and/or intervention approaches and objectives. In addition, I will also note some key issues that have limited the scope and impact of this study.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Quantitative studies have identified the significant prevalence of intimate partner violence, underscoring it as a problem worth studying. Researchers using qualitative approaches have persistently sought to understand partner violence and women's experiences of - and responses to - it, but no comprehensive thesis of qualitative work on this topic has appeared.

One can make a further distinction between traditional qualitative research approaches that attend to a content analyses of data (i.e. what speakers make their talk about), and narrative analytical qualitative research that attends to 'the 'telling moment' (i.e. what personal stories look like and what they are designed to do). Because narrative analysis focuses on the 'how' of lived experience, and not the causal 'why', analysis is framed interactionally and attempts to unravel the multiple meanings derived from interactional events while simultaneously seeking to examine the social text presented in the personal narrative (Lempert, 1994).

My literature search identified five reviews that addressed certain aspects of qualitative research in the field of intimate partner violence (IPV). The first is a review of qualitative research addressing women's first person accounts of their experiences of IPV (Sleutel, 1998). The review offers a descriptive content summary of themes identified across 32 qualitative studies within the period 1983 to 1997. There was a striking consistency of descriptions across studies: women felt entrapped in their abusive relationships, which in turn had a debilitating impact on women's self-identity; and women rationalised the abuse using denial, minimisation, and reframing of violence as a sickness. Other themes in this review were women's perceptions of the police and legal system; women's experiences with the health-care profession; community support; women's perceptions of religious institutions and leaders; the role of substance abuse in violent relationships; elderly women; black women; other cultures; women who fight back; pregnant women; and family of origin. There were several constantly repeating and re-emerging threads: sexual abuse by male family members during childhood, no

abuse prior to marriage, and sex after beatings were common themes across studies (Sleutel, 1998).

In the second review, Kearney, (2001) presents a formal theory of 'enduring love' based on a review and synthesis of the findings of 13 grounded theory studies published during the period 1984 to 1999. Here 'enduring love' is defined as a continual struggle to redefine partner violence as temporary, survivable, or reasonable by adhering to values of commitment and self-sacrifice in the relationship, and by using strategies to survive and control the psychic and physical harm of unpredictable abuse. Women moved through different phases of enduring love as the internal definitions of their violent relationships shifted: from discounting early violence, to immobilisation and demoralisation, to inevitably reaching a turning point that redefined the situation as unacceptable (Kearney, 2001).

The third article involves a review of the qualitative research that conceptualises leaving abusive relationships as a complex process involving many decisions and actions taking place over a period of months or years (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Process-of-leaving researchers take issue with the predominant focus on leaving as a single act or decision and they are also more deliberate in their efforts to counter stereotypes of abused women as helpless or passive, and to underscore women's agency (Anderson et al., 2003). Many survivors go through several phases in the process of leaving. The phases include a) endurance of and managing the violence while disconnecting from others; b) acknowledging the abuse, reframing it, and counteracting it; and c) breaking free, disengaging, and focusing on one's own needs. There appears to be a fourth, post-separation phase that is not often addressed (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

The fourth review examines the literature providing reasons for why abused women "stay" in abusive relationships (Dunn, 2005). Most of the early representations of abused women the author analyses emphasise their emotionality and their victimisation, while the more recent constructions of this collective identity emphasise their rationality and their agency. The author shows how both "victim" and "survivor" typifications provide vocabularies of motive for why abused women stay in violent relationships (Dunn, 2005).

The most recent review offers a metasynthesis from qualitative studies on the role of spirituality and religiosity with culturally diverse domestic violence survivors (Yick, 2008). The resultant sample of this review includes six qualitative research studies (and 8 articles). Nine overarching themes and concepts were identified across studies: strength and resilience; tension stemming from religious definition of family; tension stemming from religious definition of gender role expectations; spiritual vacuum; reconstruction; recouping spirit and self; new interpretations of submission; forgiveness as healing; and giving back (Yick, 2008).

My review adds to - and differs from - the above reviews in several ways. Firstly, it aims to present an updated and comprehensive overview and discussion of qualitative research into intimate partner violence. Secondly, by including both descriptive and theoretical papers, it offers a wider scope of reference regarding this topic. Thirdly, this review is not limited to first-person accounts of partner violence, and includes studies that explore the perceptions and knowledges of men and women without personal experiences of IPV. Lastly, this review explicitly addresses methodological issues and how these tie in with specific research findings - highlighting the value and need for narrative analytical approaches in IPV research.

### **2.1. Methods of systematic literature search**

The literature search for my study entailed searching for the following:

- any qualitative research using first person accounts of abused men/women as participants regarding their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) in heterosexual relationships
- any qualitative research using accounts of men/women about their perceptions and knowledges of IPV

Although intimate partner violence is an important issue to address in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships, I chose to limit my literature review to heterosexual relationships only. This decision represented an attempt to focus - and contain the extent of - the literature review; however, I am very mindful of the drawbacks of this limitation. It is worthwhile noting here that my own research study (discussed in Chapter 3) was not aimed specifically at - or limited to - young adults in heterosexual

relationships, however, all men and women who volunteered their participation came to talk about their heterosexual relationships.

I conducted the computer-based search in October 2005, and updated it in August 2007, and again in January 2009. The search was not limited to year of publication or language. I used the following search terms and databases/database platforms:

Search terms: *(violen\* OR abuse\* OR batter\*) AND (partner\* OR marital OR spouse OR dating OR intimate) AND (qualitative OR narrative).*

Databases/database platforms: PubMed; Science Direct; ISI Web of Knowledge (Web of Science and Biological Abstracts); Ebsco (Academic Search Premier; Pre- CINAHL; CINAHL; Health Source (Nursing/Academic Edition and Consumer Edition); CSA Illumina (Sociological Abstracts) and Silverplatter/Webspirs (PsychINFO).

After reading through the abstracts of the initial results, I identified a number of exclusion categories that enabled me to more clearly limit and focus the scope of this review. In an attempt to identify any obvious personal biases, I checked the criteria and process of exclusion with a colleague for validation and agreement. I chose to exclude articles specifically focusing on the following issues: health care (patient-physician issues); the police/justice system; employment/welfare; disabilities/mental health; rural/urban matters; marital abuse only; stalking only; program evaluations/interventions; and discreet groups focusing specifically on: children, the elderly, homeless women, immigrant groups, drug-treatment groups, pregnant women or shelter groups. Finally, only published works in the forms of journals, conference papers and book chapters were included (i.e. no dissertation abstracts).

## **2.2. Results and discussion of literature search**

### ***2.2.1. Populations***

The final number of references that were included in the review was 109 (101 journal articles; 5 reviews and 3 book chapters); (see APPENDIX A – TABLE 1 for a summary of these articles). The majority of studies from the literature search were from the United States, and included a variety of ethnic groups, including African-American, American-Muslim, Jewish-Israeli and Mexican-American women. Other countries

were: Sweden, Finland, South Africa, Ghana, China, Northern Israel, Canada, Mexico, Greece, Philippines, India, Mongolia and Mauritius. Participants were recruited from a variety of rural and urban settings.

Most studies were of adult women who had personal experiences of IPV, however, ages ranged from 11 to 70 years. Relationship types included dating, cohabitation and marriage. There were two studies attending to men's experiences with IPV, and six single case studies (4 with women; 1 with a premarital couple where the man was violent; and 1 male's experiences with partner violence).

Although my literature review did not include studies focusing solely on men's experiences of *perpetration* of violence, it did include studies conducted with couples identified for male violence. These qualitative studies (n=9) consider the perspectives of both partners in a dyad, and thus afford opportunities to examine how individual partners' narratives are constructed in relation to the other partner. Recent authors have argued that researchers should focus on both men and women's constructions of their relationships in order to better understand the relational construction and basis of IPV (Allison et al., 2008; Boonzaier, 2008) as well as the interactional context of conflict escalation (Winstok & Eisikovits, 2008).

There were only 9 studies that elicited both male and female views and perspectives on violence and abuse in intimate relationships. These studies focused on youth, and participants' ages ranged from 11 to 22 years. Male and female Australian youth (15-19 years) were interviewed about their experiences and understandings of dating and dating violence. Focus group studies were conducted with Canadian youth (14-19 years); English - and French - Canadian high school students; Mexican American youth (11-17 years); urban African American youth (14-22 years); middle school American urban youth (11-13 years); unmarried Filipino adolescents (15-19 years) and Chinese male and female college students. A questionnaire study was conducted with male and female American undergraduate university students about their perceptions of causes of violence in heterosexual dating relationships.

There were 7 studies conducted with female university/college women in particular (see APPENDIX A – TABLE 2). The age range of participants in these studies fell between 18 and 53 years, with a mean age of 21 years. Three of these studies used qualitative

questionnaire methods to explore: how women involved members of their social networks in the experience of abuse (Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993); black women's beliefs about abusive relationships (Berkel, Furlong, Hickman, & Blue, 2005); and the impact of the experience of dating violence on the daily lives of college women (Frederick Amar & Alexy, 2005). One study used focus group content to analyse the informal and formal helping strategies of female college sorority members (Anderson & Danis, 2007). The three remaining studies employed content analysis and grounded theory methodology to analyse semi-structured interviews with women; these studies explored: the role of culturally endorsed gender and romance narratives in normalising violence (Wood, 2001b); the decision-making processes and coping strategies of Black college women in ending abusive dating relationships (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002); and how women's vulnerabilities link to their decisions to stay in abusive relationships (Few & Rosen, 2005).

### ***2.2.2. Methodological approaches***

The majority of studies identified in this literature review (n=85) used conventional qualitative methodology, focusing on content analysis methods. Of these studies, 34 conducted a content analysis using descriptive and non-analytical techniques only; 15 studies used grounded theory methodology; and 36 authors presented a content analysis informed by a particular theoretical or conceptual framework. Here, the feminist and phenomenological approaches were the most popular. There were 27 articles that incorporated some aspect of narrative methodology in their data analysis (these studies are listed in APPENDIX A – TABLE 3).

Thus the majority of studies employed conventional qualitative content analysis methods that tend to reduce complex and original expression into categories and themes based on similarities. Data extracts are usually presented as examples of how participants 'experience' an issue, rather than how they describe it; the focus is on describing the phenomenon/experience, not on analysing how participants talk about it (i.e. attending to language and forms and functions of talk). Language is largely viewed as a transparent medium, unambiguously reflecting stable and singular meanings. This creates research representations that take the form of realist narratives, as opposed to more critical, deconstructive or reflexive narratives. These realist research representations function to tell us 'what is', and can be used by other people to evaluate and assess their own experiences of a similar issue.

Importantly, the interactive and discursive nature and co-production of interviews are rarely taken into account. This makes it difficult to apply a talk-in-interaction analysis to the data presented by these researchers (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998). As readers we are usually only presented with brief decontextualised snippets, where the contributions or influences of the researcher or other group members have been erased. Data extracts are often presented with little discussion, as though their ‘meanings’ are self-evident, and the brevity of the analysis reflects the expectation that the reader will ‘see’ the data for what it is - without needing detailed explanation or deconstruction. Furthermore, results of these studies are usually not closely combined with descriptions of the research process, methods or methodology. These underpinnings of conventional content analysis limit the opportunities for positional and/or textual reflexivity, and also make the transferability of a research text (and therefore alternative readings) difficult. Importantly, there were very few studies addressing young adults’ experiences with IPV, their perceptions and knowledges of IPV, or their ‘talk’ about IPV. Similarly, very few research studies used narrative methodology as a theoretical or systematic analytical framework. Specifically, my literature search did not identify any narrative analysis research studies that addressed the narrative characteristics of intimate partner violence stories as told by young adults (18 - 25 years) specifically. This kind of research (using this particular methodological/analytical approach, and this particular sample of participants) will contribute a much needed understanding of how young adults make sense of intimate partner violence (IPV) and what constructions of IPV do to their lives and identities.

### ***2.2.3. Focus areas/thematic categories***

In the rest of this chapter I organise the results of the literature review around 15 focus areas/thematic categories which I identified across the studies (these are numbered A-O). These focus areas are: Qualitative conceptualisations of women’s experiences of ‘battering’; Sexual coercion, violence and HIV-infection in the context of intimate partner violence; The impact of partner violence on masculine identities; Definitional dialogues: making sense of intimate partner violence; Making memories of intimate partner violence; Attending to language; Discourses and constructions of intimate partner violence; Coping with and surviving intimate partner violence; Help-seeking behaviours of women in abusive relationships; Leaving abusive relationships; Representations of intimate partner violence; Making sense of intimate partner violence; Intimate partner violence in adolescent/young adult relationships; Typologies of dating

violence; and Considering methodological issues in intimate partner violence research. Each focus area is comprehensively discussed, and where relevant, the qualitative methodological approaches used are critiqued.

### **A. Qualitative conceptualisations of women's experiences of 'battering'**

Aside from, and prior to, more qualitative conceptualisations of abuse, many researchers continue to conceptualise IPV by focusing largely on the incidence, frequency, and severity of acts of physical assault. The exclusive focus on the behavioural features of IPV, to the exclusion of women's experiences and perceptions, fails to capture both the continuous presence of partner abuse in women's lives and the meaning of the violence to women (Smith, Tessaro, & Earp, 1995; Dobash et al., 1992). The first theme I present here encapsulates familiar qualitative conceptualisations of women's experiences of 'battering', identified from early literature, namely entrapment and shame.

#### ***A.1. Entrapment: enduring partner violence***

The violent assaultive behaviour of abusive men has been qualitatively conceptualised as occurring in the context of continuous intimidation and coercion, and to be an enduring condition that causes a sense of 'entrapment' for women, rather than a set of discrete events.

Sleutel's review (1998) of qualitative research published within the period 1983 to 1997 based on women's first person accounts of their abuse experiences, noted a striking consistency of descriptions across studies. Women described themselves as prisoners trapped within their abusive relationships. Aside from it being physically difficult to leave an abusive relationship, women described the devastating and paralysing impact of the abuse on their sense of self. The abuse left women feeling numb, confused, degraded and betrayed. In addition, women reinforced their entrapment in these relationships by rationalising the abuse using denial, minimisation, and redefinition of violence as a sickness.

Abused women in Tokyo, Japan (Yoshihama, 2002) and Nicaragua (Ellsberg, Peña, Herrera, Liljestrand, & Winkvist, 2000) also gave descriptions of their experiences with IPV that bore a striking resemblance to the experience of partner abuse among abused women in Western countries. Participants' narratives of their experience with IPV



similarly suggested a web of entrapment from which women saw little possibility of escape. From the perspective of these women, physical abuse did not represent isolated events but rather a relationship based on domination and control. The partners' physical violence, extreme jealousy and control, interference with the women's social participation, isolation from supportive networks, and psychological and sexual degradation entrapped participants (Yoshihama, 2002; Ellsberg et al., 2000). Abused women frequently experienced feelings of shame and isolation which, together with a lack of family and community support, often contributed to women's difficulty in recognising and disengaging from a violent relationship (Ellsberg et al., 2000). Women furthermore recounted fear, pain, disbelief, helplessness and a sense of powerlessness, self-doubt and confusion (Yoshihama, 2002). Some women fought back literally, and others in various symbolic ways. When women took the risk of exposing what was long considered private and shameful, isolation was broken (Yoshihama, 2002).

The enduring, traumatic and multidimensional nature of IPV has been highlighted by some authors (Kearney, 2001; Smith et al., 1995). Here the chronic experience of IPV is understood to shape a woman's thoughts, feelings, sense of self, and behaviour. Based on a content analysis of unstructured focus groups with 22 'battered' women, Smith and colleagues (1995) developed the 'Women's Experiences with Battering' (WEB) Framework, which included 6 interrelated domains: perceived threat, altered identity, managing, entrapment, yearning and disempowerment (Smith et al., 1995). The domain of 'perceived threat' reflected 'battered' women's emotional and cognitive reactions to the environment created by their partners' use of violence. It also reflected the women's perceptions of their susceptibility to being harmed in the future by their male partners, the uncontrollability of the risk, and the feelings of dread their partners invoked in them. Once these women perceived their environments as harmful or stressful, they further assessed the extent of the harm, loss, threat or challenge they faced. This assessment led to cognitive or behavioural coping and 'managing'. This dimension also reflected the control women believe they had over whether or not their partners assaulted them (Smith et al., 1995).

The change in women's self-concept and the loss of self that accompanied continuous exposure to physical and psychological violence contributed to an 'altered identity'. Abused women's identities were transformed by the negative images of themselves which their partners reflected back to them. In addition, the partners' efforts to keep the

women in the relationships, the privacy and secrecy of the violence, and women's perceptions that help and support were unavailable, all contributed to making women feel 'entrapped' in the abusive relationships. Nevertheless, many women still experienced a 'yearning' in their desires and efforts to establish intimacy with their partners. Inevitably, the sustained exposure to abuse 'disempowered' the women, who gradually modified their thoughts and behaviours in accordance with the desires of their partners (Smith et al., 1995).

In a review of grounded theory qualitative studies, Kearney (2001) similarly highlights the enduring nature of love and violence in abusive relationships. Within cultural contexts that normalised relationship violence while promoting idealised romance, the women across studies dealt with the incongruity of violence in their relationships as a basic process of enduring love. Kearney (2001) defines 'enduring love' as a continual struggle to redefine partner violence as temporary, survivable, or reasonable by adhering to values of commitment and self-sacrifice in the relationship, and by using strategies to survive and control the psychic and physical harm of unpredictable abuse. As an adjective, connoting persisting or lasting, 'enduring' reflects women's attachment to their partners or to their obligation or commitment despite ongoing abuse. In the verb form of enduring, connoting an intense focus on surviving in the present, women focused on surviving each episode of violence for the sake of the hoped-for relationship, which they glimpsed or recalled periodically, and out of love for their children (Kearney, 2001).

In response to shifting definitions of their relationship situations, many women moved through different phases of enduring love in their violent relationships (Kearney, 2001). After discounting early violence for the sake of their romantic commitment, women progressed to immobilisation and demoralisation in the face of increasingly unpredictable violence that was endured by the careful monitoring of partner behaviour and the stifling of self. Inevitably women reached a turning point that redefined the situation as unacceptable. During this phase an internal process of redefinition began, and the women began to use strategies of resistance, divestment and withdrawal from the relationship. Once women managed to move out of the relationships, they took stock of their losses and gains and began a search for meaning and a new understanding of their authentic self.

In summary, theoretical conceptualisations of IPV across different countries reveal similar core themes in the descriptions of women's experiences of partner violence (Yoshihama, 2002; Kearney, 2001; Ellsberg et al., 2000; Smith et al., 1995; Landenburger, 1989). This suggests that these experiences, to a large degree, transcend specific cultural contexts and are common to women around the world (Ellsberg et al., 2000). Consistent findings across studies indicate that intimate partner violence is an enduring and traumatic experience that impacts on women's thoughts, feelings, sense of self, and behaviour. IPV is often persistent and severe, occurs in the context of continuous intimidation and coercion and is inextricably linked to attempts to control and dominate women (Dobash et al., 1992).

It is interesting to consider the years of publication of the above studies, i.e. ranging from 1995 to 2002. It is notable that more recent qualitative research has been suggestive of alternative conceptualisations of women's experiences with partner violence, focusing on strengths and active coping, as opposed to disempowerment and entrapment.

### ***A.2. Shame***

The qualitative conceptualisation of entrapment described above can have devastating consequences for an abused woman's emotional well-being. Literature on violence against women has highlighted recurrent emotions of powerlessness, helplessness, loneliness, fear, low self-esteem, self-blame and self-hatred (Walker, 1993; Mills, 1985; Denzin, 1984) as inevitable effects of IPV.

The experience of emotional abuse in particular has been found to have long-term negative consequences for women, evoking shame, emotional loneliness, despair, guilt, confusion, anger, and diminished identity (Lammers, Ritchie, & Robertson, 2005). Lammers and colleagues (2005) identified three distinct forms of emotional abuse experienced by women, namely, dominant control, silent control and manipulation, and highlight the misuse of power as the core of emotional abuse.

Alongside these other emotions, 'shame' has been viewed as one of the profound and long-lasting adverse effects of enduring physical and emotional partner violence, affecting the way in which women cope with abuse (Street & Arias, 2001). Moreover, a study by Buchbinder and Eisikovits (2003) has indicated that shame uniquely influences

an abused woman's self-image, especially if it is also related to her experiences in her family of origin. The authors examined the experience of shame as a central existential theme in the lives of Jewish Israeli abused women, and found shame to be prevalent in the women's phenomenological biographies, cutting across both their family of origin and the subsequent intimate dyadic relationship with their partners (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2003). Shame was thus a continuous emotion in the past and present existential experience of these women.

Given that for many women the past was a source of insecurity and shame, the abuser's knowledge of that past had exploitative and degrading effects. Therefore, in the violence-ridden marriages, shame became a means of hurting and manipulating the other, and a means of aggressive exploitation by the perpetrator. Abusive men used shame as a constant feature of dyadic life and as confirmation of the supposed basic inner defects of women (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2003).

In abused women's attempts to leave, the social aspects of shame became active, thus pressing women to stay in the marriage or relationship while feeling vulnerable. This concealment of the abuse in order to survive resulted in the acceptance of loneliness, loss of social ties with others, and loss of trust in self and others. Shame was also a critical element in trapping the self in negative interactions with others, thus exacerbating feelings of worthlessness and isolation (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2003). Thus, both the sense of entrapment and the experience of shame have been identified as significant obstacles for women in their attempts to break free from abusive relationships.

## **B. Sexual coercion, violence and HIV-infection in the context of intimate partner violence**

Although partner sexual abuse is clearly an important dimension of partner violence, it has received less research attention than physical and emotional partner abuse.

Researchers have cautioned that sexual abuse should not be considered in a vacuum, but must be seen in the context of enduring coercion, degradation and control (Logan, Cole, & Shannon, 2007). It is argued that measures of sexual abuse that focus exclusively on threatened or forced sex may miss some significant dimensions of sexual abuse within the context of chronic partner violence (Logan et al., 2007).

Logan and colleagues (2007) examined the similarities and differences in non-physically forced sexually coercive and sexually degrading tactics experienced by 31 women who did and 31 women who did not report forced sex by a violent partner using both quantitative and qualitative data. Women in violent relationships, regardless of whether they reported forced sex, were not comfortable with the sexual component of the relationship for a variety of reasons: the selfishness of their partner; sex had become a chore or something they felt uncomfortable with; and women recognised that their partner used sex as another way to control them or as an attempt to make up with them after fighting. Violent partners used a range of non-physically forced sexual coercion and degradation tactics to gain access to sex, including verbal manipulation, verbal pressure, substance use, and implicit threats/force. Specific coercive tactics sometimes far exceeded what might be considered 'normal' with women describing continual pestering for sex that last for days and interfere with sleep, caring for children, or other duties (Logan et al., 2007).

Thus, women from both groups in this study perceived their experiences of sexual abuse to have been deliberately designed for the purpose of humiliating and degrading them. Finally, it is also important to note that sexual resistance was a theme that emerged from the qualitative information that suggested that women were not just passive victims of violence (Logan et al., 2007).

Using an instrumental case study approach, Stevens and Richards (1998) draw attention to another jeopardy women face in violent relationships. They present an analysis of HIV infection in a woman aged 41 years who experienced violence in her marital relationship over a period of two decades. The woman's experiences in the constricted world of her husband's violence, coercion, control and cocaine misuse were inseparable from her experiences of contracting and living with HIV/AIDS. For this woman, AIDS was a deathly consequence of her husband's violation and mistreatment of her. Furthermore, the whole atmosphere of violence, annihilation of self-worth and oppressive restrictions likely contributed to the late stage identification and treatment of her HIV-related illnesses (Stevens & Richards, 1998). The narrative is one of endurance and fortitude that highlights how partner violence and HIV infection may be connected for women.

Certainly, violence in intimate relationships is today recognised for its critical influence on women's attempts at protecting themselves from unwanted sexual intercourse, STI's and HIV (Wood & Jewkes, 1998b). In a qualitative study examining the intersections of risk for intimate partner violence and HIV infection in South Africa, Fox and colleagues (2007) showed that black adult women experienced myriad forms of abuse, which reinforced each other to create a climate that sustained abuse and multiplied HIV risk. Violence and threats of violence prohibited most of the women from adopting key risk reduction techniques such as abstaining from sex, limiting their number of sexual partners, and using condoms. In addition, for many women, attempts at safer sex negotiation served to prompt further violence and abuse leading to a reciprocal relationship between risk for abuse and HIV (Fox et al., 2007). Furthermore, for most of the women, psychological and emotional abuse, such as threats of leaving the relationship or seeking out other partners, created a climate of control that made it difficult for women to challenge their partners or sometimes made them submit to risky sex (Fox et al., 2007).

The themes discussed thus far have conceptualised physical, emotional and sexual violent tactics as occurring in the context of continuous intimidation, humiliation and coercion. Intimate partner violence has been characterised as an enduring and persistent experience that causes a sense of entrapment for women, and negatively impacts on a woman's identity, health and sense of self. The next theme attends to the impact of partner violence on masculine identities.

### **C. The impact of partner violence on masculine identities**

Although the prevalence of abused men is argued to be significantly lower than the rates of abused women (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Dobash et al., 1992), there are men who are abused by their wives (Lenton, 1995; George, 1994; Straus & Gelles, 1986). Some researchers tend to advocate that partner abuse is the result of the inequality in a patriarchal society (Kurz, 1993), and that IPV involves a man's power and domination over a woman. Consequently, it has been argued that this view aids in the creation of the stereotype of the violent male, which allows for the presence of neither violent women nor abused men (Migliaccio, 2001). Moreover, it denies the possibility that patriarchy may also result in repercussions for men in a situation that has been gendered (Migliaccio, 2001).

My literature search rendered only two articles exploring male experiences of ‘battering’ or IPV. In an analysis of the narratives of 12 husbands who have been abused by their wives, Migliaccio (2001) offers a discussion of the issues those men who are abused may encounter, and links it to previous research on masculinity. He presents his research as a supplement to research on IPV and not as a counter to studies of wife abuse.

It has been argued that the socialising process for men is less about internalising what is masculine and more about ascertaining what behaviours are not masculine (Harris, 1995, cited in Migliaccio, 2001). Men ‘perform’ their gender to others both out of a need for acceptance and out of fear of being feminised or emasculated (Kimmel, 1996, cited in Migliaccio, 2001). Men failing to adhere to the culturally defined masculine roles are often marginalised as ‘other’ by the dominant group, and designated a lower status in the social hierarchy (Migliaccio, 2001).

Furthermore, victimisation has come to be viewed as a ‘female’ experience, with men most often being the victimisers or protectors (Howard & Hollander, 1996). Thus men who have been physically abused by their wives may feel marginalised, as their masculinity is called into question (Migliaccio, 2001). Fearing emasculation, many men attempt to hide or deny those aspects of their identities or lives that result in this, such as being abused. Once labelled as victims, it seems implausible for these men to exhibit traditional masculine characteristics, such as independence, strength and control (Harris, 1995).

In Migliaccio’s (2001) study, there were three messages concerning the development of masculine identities that appeared most relevant to the 12 men’s experiences: self-reliance, stoicism and control. A challenge to any of these characteristics had a devastating effect upon the maintenance of the man’s masculinity, resulting in embarrassment.

Respondents felt responsible for the loss of control of themselves and the relationship, and perceived the collapse of the family as a strike to their masculinity (Migliaccio, 2001). This failure to measure up to society’s expectations (Harris, 1995), caused these men to feel shame and embarrassment. As research has shown with abused women, shame often leads to silence (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2003), which in turn allows the

violence to persist, and adds to the man's embarrassment and self-hatred. This loss of power incites feelings of anger, thereby increasing the shame, and potentially spiralling into episodes of violence/rage (Migliaccio, 2001). A similar dynamic has been described with abused women (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

A masculine identity of being self-reliant and stoical forced these men to minimise the abuse, and to refrain from seeking assistance (Migliaccio, 2001). Furthermore, given that 'abused spouse' has become a gendered female role, those men whose situations became public record ran the risk of having their masculinity publicly scrutinised. The men in this study who did attempt to seek out assistance felt they were met with prejudice, scepticism and demoralising reactions from institutions that could have aided them with their situations. These results thus offer evidence that the patriarchal structure can have adverse effects upon men who deviate from masculine ideals (Migliaccio, 2001).

#### **D. Definitional dialogues: making sense of intimate partner violence**

As pointed out above, early studies have failed to capture the complexities of abusive relationships, and have not considered the conditions, contexts, and consequences of women's actions in abusive relationships. More recent studies of women's responses to violence allow for more complex articulations of women's experiences of abuse and how women themselves make sense of these (Boonzaier, 2008; Cavanagh, 2003; Lempert, 1997a; Lempert, 1996b). These articulations include a consideration of how men make sense of their use of violence, and how these definitional dialogues influence women's meaning-making and responses within the context of their violent relationships.

In essence, it is argued that men and women give violence meaning; they define it and this definitional process significantly influences the ways in which each responds to it. Furthermore, the process of attaching meaning is interactive and relational in character (Boonzaier, 2008; Cavanagh, Dobash, Dobash, & Lewis, 2001).



***D.1. Men's meaning making of - and responses to - their use of intimate partner violence***

Within partner violence relationships, men exert power and control, not only by using violence, but also by seeking to impose their understanding of what is happening in the relationship. Many men thus try to influence not only whether a violent incident is defined as such, but also how women will understand and respond to that (violent) incident (Cavanagh, 2003; Lempert, 1997a). Men's responses to their use of violence must therefore be considered as purposeful, dynamic and intentional (Cavanagh et al., 2001).

From this standpoint, Cavanagh and colleagues (2001) use Goffman's concept of 'remedial work' (1971), and the three related devices of accounts, apologies and requests to analyse 122 men's accounts of their responses to violence. The analysis reveals the exculpatory and expiatory discourses which dominate men's narratives and which expose the purposeful yet paradoxical nature of their responses to violence, directed at mitigating and obfuscating culpability while at the same time seeking forgiveness and absolution (Cavanagh et al., 2001). The authors suggest that men employ these devices in an effort to impose their own definitions upon their partner, thereby neutralising or eradicating the woman's experience of the abuse. This in turn enables the men to control the ways in which the woman partner interprets and responds to the abuse.

In the above study, denial, particularly in the early stages of the relationship and at the beginning of the use of violence, was a significant feature of men's accounts (Cavanagh et al., 2001). While the majority of the men acknowledged that they had been violent to their partner, many recast this behaviour as something that was not defined as violence, and primarily saw themselves as 'non-violent' - given that they did not use violence against others. This form of denial implied that violence against a woman partner was somehow different from other types of violence, and this distinction was often associated with some aspect of her behaviour. Another type of denial involved 'not remembering': some men reported that they often could not remember particular violent episodes. Men's denial through 'selective amnesia' could be construed as one of the means whereby they exercised power in relation to the meaning of their violence.

Cavanagh and colleagues (2001) make the important point that, as well as being mediated through experience, meaning is reflected in language. The failure to articulate the language of violence will inevitably restrict the meaning of violent experiences and potentially deny reality. Power is deeply embedded in the words we use, as well as the words we do not use. Therefore, silence - the refusal to name or speak about violence - is a powerful strategy of control. It is suggested that women and men are differentially located in relation to the naming of violence, with men in violent relationships having more power than women to define and give meaning to their behaviour (Cavanagh et al., 2001). By remaining silent on critical aspects of their violent behaviour, men eliminate those key considerations from interpretation, and reduce women's experiences to 'unreality'.

The analysis of the 122 men's accounts further revealed that the process of diverting responsibility and allocating blame elsewhere was extremely common (Cavanagh et al., 2001). Blaming others allowed men to admit to acts of violence whilst at the same time absolving themselves of some, if not all, of the responsibility for them. Women partners were woven into men's accounts of violence, and were the most consistent recipients of men's blame. They were blamed for many things: for provoking the violence through some behaviour; for failing to behave in particular wife-like ways; for not performing their domestic responsibilities; and for 'starting' violence either verbally or physically. In blaming women, men construed violence as a problem for women and not for themselves and thereby absolved themselves of responsibility for their own actions.

Furthermore, men's accounts often reflected their belief in a culture of violence within the community and/or a cycle of violence within the family, and many used such notions to justify their behaviour. Such experiences left many believing that their own violence as an adult was somehow 'normal' or even inevitable and beyond their control (Cavanagh et al., 2001). In addition, men's excessive use of alcohol and their temper were offered as important elements of reduced competence and featured significantly in their accounts of violence. Even when men admitted their violent acts, they usually minimised their seriousness and rejected the term 'batterer' or 'abuser'. Many regarded an act as 'violent' only if it reached certain levels of severity or frequency.

The men in this study often apologised, expressed remorse, and promised to change. Apologies were often followed by requests for affection, reassurance and confirmation

of love. Again, expressions of sorrow were not only attempts to assuage guilt, but were also powerful neutralisers. Cavanagh and colleagues (2001) suggest that men's willingness to perform their own castigation in the form of apologies can serve other purposes. First, it has a management element, for in berating themselves, men potentially close off opportunities for women to do the same. Secondly, men can exaggerate the apology thereby giving women the task of cutting the self-derogation short. Therefore, the self-castigation performed by an apology can result in a mutual alignment of men and women in relation to the violent act. Furthermore, acceptance of the apology can be taken as signifying the end of the matter, thereby limiting dialogue and negotiation between the couple. Many men used apologies not only to expiate their guilt but also to exculpate the memory of violence from the relationship: apologies can thus be used to disconnect one violent incident from another, thereby ensuring that violence is not seen as an ongoing feature of the relationship but rather as fragmented incidents detached from the relationship (Cavanagh et al., 2001).

#### ***D.2. Women's meaning making of - and responses to - violence in their relationships***

The findings from the above study with men demonstrate the range, purposefulness and intent of men's responses, and how they impact on women. Following from this study, Cavanagh (2003) presents accounts of the ways in which women understand violence within the context of their relationships, and how they respond to it in diverse ways. Interviews with 136 women demonstrated how successful some men were in imposing 'definitional hegemony'. In attempting to make sense of the violence, some women, like men, diluted the impact and significance of the violence, minimised its frequency and severity, and used men's rationales and the culturally held beliefs about the causes of abuse to explain his behaviour. According to the author, these responses should be seen as an outcome of an interactive process whereby men seek to impose their will and enforce their 'account' of the violence (Cavanagh, 2003).

As the women's definitions of their experiences changed, many developed a repertoire of responses/strategies employed to reduce/stop or manage the violence and to resist men's efforts to impose dominant mitigatory understandings of their experiences of violence. Importantly, the women's responses were played out in relation to men's responses, i.e. the interconnectedness of women's and men's responses to men's violence against women was highlighted (Cavanagh, 2003).

Similarly, in a grounded theory study with 32 women, Lempert (1997a) analyses how abused women negotiate constructions of knowledge of self, situation, and violence within the complexity of violent intimate relationships. The author argues that the analysis of the simultaneity of love and violence and the simultaneity of victimisation and agency, which form the contextual frames of the interactions, is necessary to shed light on the organisation and display of violence in intimate, interpersonal relationships (Lempert, 1997a). The paradox between women's agency and women's victimisation is salient in the author's analysis for these "victims" are also active agents defining, interpreting, and to a limited extent, negotiating with their partners (Lempert, 1997a).

According to the women's accounts of their abusive relationships, before any physical violence occurred, their abusive partners sought definitional hegemony over their mutually interactive situations (Lempert, 1997a). In the process of modifying their actions to placate their partners, the women contributed to - and supported - the men's definitions and perceptions of them, and consequently altered their own understandings of self (Lempert, 1997a).

While involved in these definitional dialogues with their abusive partners, the women were simultaneously involved in internal dialogues. The ambiguities of the situations forced women to ask questions of self, and required that women create or invent explanations for the violence without input from outsiders. Under the impact of the day to day denials of their own definitional frameworks, many women lost confidence in their abilities to define their own realities (Lempert, 1997a).

Definitional dialogues furthermore occur within a framework of cultural gender-based, hierarchical expectations. Many women had accepted without question the cultural ideologies of love and family that constructed the wife as responsible for well being in the private sphere of the home. They therefore reported blaming themselves and expecting others to blame them for the problematic nature of their intimate relationships (Lempert, 1997a). In addition, many women implicitly accepted the assumption that there were conditions under which their partners could control them through the use of force. The terms "violent", "abusive", and "battered" were often negotiated by the abusive men and the abused women in terms of severity, not legitimacy.

The above studies discussed under this theme of 'definitional dialogues' illustrate the complex process through which women make sense of their experiences of abuse. They highlight how definitional dialogues of abuse, in which women are engaged, are part of the ongoing struggles over definitional autonomy within evolving relationships. Furthermore, they show how women's constructive meaning-making processes originate in definitional dialogues with self, with partners, and with outsiders (Lempert, 1997a). These studies also suggest that women's changing and evolving definitions of the situation are the necessary conditions for their simultaneous and subsequent transformations of self. This perspective underscores the value of a methodological analysis that attends to language, and how women use it to talk about, and make sense of, IPV.

### **E. Making memories of intimate partner violence**

Following from the above discussion on women's meaning-making processes, this theme attends to how women make memories of intimate violence. It again highlights how individuals attempt to make sense of their experiences, and construct identity, through the use of language and narrative. This theme also underscores the methodological importance of considering the communicative context between the narrator and interviewer.

When people are involved in traumatic events, they are confronted with critical and existential questions regarding their identity and their relation with others and the world. People give meaning to these experiences of trauma and violence through the construction of memory (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a). In their attempts to integrate their experiences, people are often torn between the need to recollect and process the memories and the need to distance themselves and forget or detach from the pain and threat associated with these memories (Christianson, 1992, cited in Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005). The memory thus represents a person's attempt to control what has happened, and his/her commentary on those events. Brunner (1994, p.53, cited in Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005) states: "Self is a perpetually rewritten story. What we remember from the past is what is necessary to keep that story satisfactorily well formed".

Although most research in IPV is based on the memories of participants (captured through self-reports), there are few studies directly addressing the process of

remembering the violent event per se, or the structure, content, and the functions of those memories (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a; Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002). The literature identifies three lines of inquiry that overlap with memory research (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a; Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002), including: a) the study of minimisation, forgetting, redefining, and denial of violent events (the so-called ‘partial memory’); b) the study of the ways in which couples in domestic violence represent themselves to self and others (accounts and attributions); and c) the study of narratives of domestic violence.

The concept of ‘partial memory’ is used to describe the proportion of remembered versus forgotten events or experiences (Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002). The phenomenon of minimising and ‘forgetting’ violence has been found to characterise both abusive men and abused women (Armstrong et al., 2001; Cavanagh et al., 2001; Hydén, 1995; Lucal, Dutton, Hohnecker, Halle, & Burghardt, 1995; Dutton, 1995b; Ellis, 1989). These phenomena have been placed within explanatory and clinical-theoretical frameworks, such as ‘denial’ or post-traumatic stress disorder (Walker, 2000; Dutton & Goodman, 1994; Saunders, 1994; Astin, Lawrence, & Foy, 1993), where the minimisation, denial and forgetting of the violent event are explained as methods by which women cope with ongoing trauma in a threatening context, and men deny and minimise their responsibility, thereby reconstructing their self-representation and redefining their identity (Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993). In addition, it has been demonstrated that partners do not agree about the occurrence of violence in their relationships (Moffitt et al., 1997; Bohannon, Dosser, & Lindley, 1995; Szinovacz & Egley, 1995). For instance, in a study with 48 women and men with and without a history of IPV, Armstrong and colleagues (2001) explored the reasons underlying interpartner disagreement about the occurrence of conflict. In this study, IPV participants were significantly more likely to state that: victims (usually women) are more likely to remember violence in comparison to perpetrators; men and women will often lie about a conflict if the law gets involved; women lie about what happened out of fear for their well-being; men and women have different definitions of what constitutes a fight; and, men and women forget because they want to forget. There was also a tendency to blame the other partner for the abuse, as opposed to self-blaming.

Similarly, the second line of inquiry deals with attribution of intent, responsibility, and blame in an attempt to take on questions of causality (Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002). The

literature discusses the issue of attribution with concepts such as accounts, justifications, apologies and excuses (Flinck, Astedt-Kurki, & Paavilainen, 2008; Cavanagh et al., 2001; Eisikovits, Goldblatt, & Winstok, 1999; Viano & Bograd, 1994; Senchak & Leonard, 1993). From this perspective, both men and women use attributions and accounts as a means to deflect blame from self and partner so that the violent event can change its meaning and become understandable and perhaps even tolerable (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a).

Lastly, the narrative study of domestic violence, although seldom attempted, represents an attempt to place intimate violence in context, and attends to how memories are communicated through narrative. The few studies that take this approach give detailed descriptions and analyses as to the ways people organise their memories and take into account the communicative context between the narrator and interviewer (Boonzaier, 2008; Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b; Lempert, 1997a; Hydén, 1995; Lempert, 1994; Riessman, 1994).

Each of these three lines of research summarised above acknowledge, either explicitly or implicitly, the fact that stories and memories of violence do not occur in a vacuum but in a context that includes amongst others the interviewer representing the ultimate audience of the 'generalised other'. "For most participants in domestic violence research, there is an inherent need to reconstruct the experience of violence in ways that are coherent with their perceived identity and with a 'normalized' life story, and in a manner that has both meaning and internal logic" (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a, p.12).

For instance, it has been shown that batterers use narrative devices in order to achieve a sense of coherence when telling their stories and justifying their violent behaviour (Borochowitz, 2008). In one study, men constructed a "couple narrative" that focused on an idealised marital relationship rather than "allowing" the wife her story; men constructed a story around the theme of "she's not the same woman I married" which portrayed the violence as an attempt to discipline their wives (Borochowitz, 2008).

The following two studies attend to how women make memories of intimate violence. In the first paper, the authors attend to structure (not just the content) of the recollections of events (Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002). They focus on language (e.g. clichés, stereotypes, images, sentence constructions, use of words, etc.) and the social

construction through language (e.g. personal and social knowledges). Although they refer somewhat briefly to the interactive nature of the interview, and its influence in what data is constructed, they do not present a further discussion or analysis of this. In the second paper (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a), the authors use a narrative conceptualisation of memory; they present a thematic analysis, with a focus on the structural elements and use of language (e.g. discursive techniques). The authors are reflective in their acknowledgement of the context and constructive influence of the interviewee-interviewer interaction, and include the interviewer in the data excerpts given.

Eisikovits and Winstok (2002) explored the structure and content of recollections of violent events among cohabiting couples who remained together in spite of the violence. As discussed previously in this chapter, much of the earlier literature on why abused women do not leave the relationship focuses its attention on entrapment. This study is in line with more recent trends in domestic violence literature that shift attention to choice in examining the act of staying. From this perspective women are seen as consciously negotiating their reality and actively creating meaning within the constraints of their situational freedom (Cavanagh, 2003; Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstok, 2000; Eisikovits, Buchbinder, & Mor, 1998).

Separate in-depth interviews were held with 24 heterosexual couples who remained together in spite of the violence. Respondents were identified through social service agencies and municipal police departments in Northern Ireland. In most cases, the aggression was mutual. The authors analysed the memories of violence using a three-stage procedure (Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002): the first stage addressed the structure of recollections; the second stage addressed the content of memories (i.e. what was remembered of violent events); in the third stage, they identified the relational context of the recollections (e.g. choosing to stay or being prevented from leaving).

Both men and women living in violent relationships described a contextual variation ranging from choosing to stay to being prevented from leaving. The memory of violence was constructed in a manner meant to achieve coherence with the appropriate context. The findings showed that the more individuals perceived staying as a choice, the narrower and weaker were the scope and intensity of memories of violence. Conversely, the more staying was perceived as forced by circumstances, the more



memories of violence tended to be expanded and intense. Although most women were identified in the content category of being prevented from leaving and having no place to go, the majority of men were in the category of choosing to stay (Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002).

The above study suggests taking a non-judgemental approach to memories of IPV and examining them as a manifestation of the choices made by participants. When partners remain together in spite of violence, the content and organisation of their memories need to be constructed in a manner that makes this decision coherent with their everyday reality and accountable to audiences in immediate interactive contexts, such as the interview situation in this study (Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002).

In the second study, Enosh and Buchbinder (2005a) similarly explore the reconstruction of memory of participants in intimate partner violence. They specifically attend to the ways in which interviewees tell the stories of violence in order to define the experiential distance between themselves and the remembered violent event. The major focus is on the role played by emotional and discursive techniques, such as emotional reflection and focusing on identity issues, in constructing distance from experience. The interviewees were 20 Israeli couples living together, who had reported to social workers/police at least one violent event in their relationship over the year prior to the interview. Although the majority of couples reported male-to-female violence, 7 of the 20 couples reported mutual acts of violence.

The authors describe the level of relating to the violent experience as existing on a plane defined by two axes: the level of emotional reliving of the experience, and the level of abstraction one uses. The analysis of the data yielded 4 broad categories that described the range of ways of reconstructing experience (Enosh et al., 2005a): 'Knowledge', described narration emanating from direct remembering and reliving, with complete details of the event; 'Awareness of mental processes', included reflective awareness and descriptions of emotions and cognitive processes; 'Awareness of identity', included the construction of the personal characteristics and identities of each partner and of the couple as a unit - here interviewees achieved an even higher level of abstraction at the cost of discarding the actual memories and the emotions directly related to them; and finally 'Alienation' was characterised by a refusal to observe, reflect or remember, and total disengagement from the experience and memory of violence. The authors found

that women tended to lean toward 'knowledge', while 'alienation' was characteristic mainly of men (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a).

Each level of reliving/abstraction served as a constructed 'schema' (Schank & Abelson, 1995, cited in Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005) that fulfilled several functions for the interviewee. First, it allowed for the abstraction of events and the distancing of the actual experience. Second, it allowed the interviewee to redefine the boundaries of 'reality' and to create an account that served as an inner logic for the violent events and provided coherence for the life story of the interviewee (Bruner, 1994; Bruner, 1990). Finally, it allowed the interviewee to construct a story that would be acceptable to immediate and imaginary audiences: the interviewer and the potential readers of the study (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b).

This study emphasises that remembering life events is rarely a function of merely recalling the event as it happened. Rather, it is frequently a process of reconstructing those events in ways that correspond to the current formulation of the interviewee's life story. The ways in which interviewees are retelling the experience is thus crucial for understanding the meaning(s) of the experience for them (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a).

Methodologically, Enosh and Buchbinder (2005a; 2005b) recommend that even when conducting a thematic analysis, the researcher should be alert to variations in themes that may arise from the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. The interviews in their study were analysed thematically using content cross-case analysis, and whenever the impact of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, or lack thereof, was relevant, the analyses took it into account (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a).

The above two studies furthermore underscore the methodological importance of attending to the interactional and performative functions of interviewee's narratives. It is necessary to think about what's at stake for a participant in talking about their experiences in a particular way, i.e. it is understood that participants have specific investments in how their talk achieves certain self-presentation and interactional goals. During interviews, participants negotiate how they want to be known by the stories they develop collaboratively with the interviewer. Their remembering and talk are constructed in ways that correspond to the current formulation and meaning of their

preferred selves, and they're simultaneously attending to the expectations and responses of those with whom they are talking.

## **F. Attending to language**

The research studies discussed under this theme further highlight the importance of attending to language in the focus and analysis of qualitative data. Specifically, these authors attend to the figurative and metaphorical language women use in coping with IPV, the subjectivity of language use, and women's use of language in constructing their personal narratives of IPV.

These studies contribute to our understanding of the power of language in shaping abused women's realities. They are based on the assumption that language and linguistic symbols are a key medium for constructing social reality. Here it is understood that, through language, we both symbolise reality, and make it real by structuring the experience, organising it, and creating a sense of continuity and coherence in it (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999). The methodology of these studies is premised on the belief that, in their personal narratives, abused women narrators use language structure to promote understanding and interpretation of their stories (Lempert, 1994). This perspective allows for a focus on the narrative itself, i.e. not only the 'what' is being said, but a reflexivity on 'how' it is produced.

Methodologically, the authors of these studies reflect on their position and influence as researchers. They clearly position themselves with regards to their epistemological and theoretical frameworks, and explain the methodology of their analysis throughout their papers. They furthermore combine the discussion of their results with descriptions of their methodological/analytical approach. There is textual reflexivity, i.e. language is turned back on itself, and attention is paid to language and structure. However, in some cases, the text is presented in isolated excerpts, thus precluding the possibility of making alternative readings of large parts of the narratives.

The final research representations from these studies serve as critical, deconstructive and/or reflexive narratives. The authors emphasise language and the social construction of narratives, and look at the larger social context (especially gender systems) that women have to manipulate to survive and within which their talk is embedded.

### ***F.1. The figurative language women use in coping with IPV***

The intimate violence literature has described various coping and survival strategies women use to deal with the violence, including hiding the victimisation; adapting to men's wishes and presenting a happy family front; coping with men's attempts to control, isolate, blame and deny the violence; and using tactics to control the severity of violence and keep the self intact (Lempert, 1996b). Although all of these coping strategies include linguistic elements, most research touches on this aspect only indirectly rather than systematically. The language that women use in coping has seldom been the focus of investigation (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

Hammock (2000) analysed the figurative language (similes and metaphors) used by abused Mexican women at different points of group therapy, in order to understand the fundamental core of their experience. A structural analysis method involved close inspection and analysis of particular and distinctive word choices used in a figurative or creative way. This analysis identified metaphors and similes that the participants reproduced in order to understand their individual realities. The women certainly used figurative language to describe their feelings and self-identity as a result of male partner violence. For example, figurative language was used to describe feeling "stuck" in feelings of low self-worth, and to help them in the process of freeing themselves from this feeling. The results showed that figurative language can help women in the process of freeing themselves from "old" stories, and becoming conscious of a "new narrative". Words are therefore viewed as transformative, where the women - newly empowered - get things done with words (Hammock, 2000).

### ***F.2. Women's metaphorical language of control***

The above study highlights the role of figurative language in how women construct their experiences of IPV. Following from this, another key motif in women's linguistic construction of reality is the concept of control. Again, research on women's language as part of coping with intimate violence seldom addresses linguistic expressions of control and their meaning.

Eisikovits and Buchbinder (1999) analysed the language that 25 women in northern Israel used in coping with 'battering'. They present abused women's perceptions of violent events and their development, as reflected in the metaphors they use. More specifically, the authors analysed the ways in which women's perceptions of

interpersonal relationships and of themselves were reflected in the metaphoric structures they presented to audiences (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

The theme of control was prevalent in abused women's metaphoric descriptions and was divided into two major grounded categories: one was related to metaphors reflecting women's perceptions of their partner's attempts to control themselves and the women. The other was related to metaphors describing women's attempts to control the violent situation by controlling themselves (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999). A common theme identified in the interviews was related to the women's perception of their male partners as being in a constant struggle for self-control. The violence was seen as a result of failure in this struggle. For example, the metaphors of a 'volcano', 'nerves', 'fire' or 'amok' pointed to the unpredictability and forceful nature of the uncontrolled anger and violence that broke all boundaries ("it bursts out like a rocket"; the 'leak' "flows out of him"). Such anger became the man's formidable enemy with whom he was involved in a heroic struggle for control against all odds. This split enabled the women to preserve a positive image of their partner and to see every incident of loss of control as part of his own defeat and victimisation. Furthermore, once loss of control could be attributed to a state of amok or craziness it needed no explanation (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

The metaphoric perception of the man's intense anger was also shown to intensify the woman's attempts to predict her partner's ability to control himself. Although the details of specific violent outbursts were unpredictable, the overall tendency to 'explode' was known and familiar to the women. These women thus expected themselves to be in charge of predicting and preventing their partners' violence. Once they succeeded in such attempts, their illusion that overall control had been re-established was reinforced and they could continue to live in the situation. This role division established a complementary relationship whereby the "we-ness" was preserved. In addition, the women directed an enormous amount of energy towards avoiding escalation and balancing and controlling the partner's tension. These efforts to balance the pressure made the theme of self-control central in the woman's everyday life and the couple's joint reality (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

Furthermore, the metaphoric perception of the partner enables a woman to create a successful split between the violent man who abuses her and the person with whom she

chooses to live. Two complementary facets of her partner thus emerge: one transforms the partner into a stranger through his violence; the other conserves the partner's "good image". By making the man into a stranger, the woman can distance herself from him as a violent person and estrange herself from the intimate relationship. This enables her to deal with the violent events in a rational way, and to remain feeling close to the part of him that she can accept (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

The authors show how the women's words have a "double-edged sword": they can be effective in controlling their partner's balance and moods, but at the same time, they also have the power to incite or avoid violence, depending on how their words are used. The women metaphorically perceived their words as balancing the men's physical superiority: he hits dangerously and she talks dangerously. This sense of balance is further reinforced by the experience of women that the partner's violence is an act of retribution for her sharp tongue. She can choose to bring a silent man to violence or not and therefore controls the situation by controlling her words. Furthermore, as she develops control over the verbal context, she also reframes the silence as power. Thus, when she decides to "shut up", she successfully redefines it as a source of control and strength rather than as a sign of capitulation and humiliation (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

The data from this study highlights an important aspect of the struggle for control which is related to the woman's perception of her partner as deliberately attempting to provoke her loss of control. When her partner succeeds in bringing her to lose control the woman experiences guilt for her 'inappropriate' behaviour; she also feels a sense of helplessness as he now controls her lack of control. They now share similar positions of lack of control. Since her sense of survival is based on her ability to control him and his violence, this loss can be detrimental to her view of herself (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

By making metaphorical language their object of investigation, the authors' findings indicate that metaphors of control in abused women's experience reflect the complex experiential structure of their life in violence. They increase the women's ability to survive experiences that otherwise would be unbearable and, as such, create a sense of power in coping. At the same time, they enable women to be part of the normative structure in which the language of control is prevalent (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

The surface structure of these metaphors provides a plausible story of the women's lives in violence in which they seemingly accept men's control. Within this context, men hold the power to define personal and interpersonal situations through language and to successfully achieve "definitional hegemony" (Lempert, 1996a). Under such conditions, women are forced to "renegotiate reconstructions" to cope with the abuser's power (Lempert, 1996a). As part of this negotiation process, the deep structure of metaphors is functional. This level of meaning reflects the hope that they have some measure of control over the violence, and the continued belief that it can be stopped. Once such hope takes hold in a woman's experience, her need for relatedness is satisfied by the fact that she will stay in the relationship despite her partner's violence (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

This theme of control was again highlighted in a recent study that analysed the escalation of conflict in couples - where the men use violence against women (Winstok & Eisikovits, 2008). In some cases, men deliberately presented themselves as having difficulties in self-control - which in turn served as a motive for their partners to succumb to demands in order to avoid conflicts with them. Women were more aware than their male counterparts of the development of the conflict in general and of their own and their partners' self-control capability. This is understandable, given that the loss of control has more severe implications for women than men. This awareness enabled women to regulate both the conflicts they initiated themselves, as well as those initiated by their partners. Again, whereas the men tried to control themselves and their partners, the women tried to control their partners' ability to control themselves.

The above studies highlight that women in abusive relationships are simultaneously controlled by - and controlling - the violent situation. Helping women to become more reflective over the language they use and the extent to which this contributes to and reflects oppression is an important means to change their relation to themselves and the world (Denzin, 1984, cited in Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999) and thereby achieve some measure of empowerment (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

### ***F.3. The subjectivity of language use***

This reflexivity over language use is brought into further focus by Carter (2002), who - from a subject-position of having experienced spousal abuse - reflects on her language and meaning-making of her experiences, and compares it to academic discourses on

spousal abuse. Using parallel texts, the author juxtaposes her personal account of spousal abuse (based on her diaries and reminiscences) against information derived from research literature, and raises questions concerning objectivity in scholarship. In considering the politics of naming a condition, the author asks how subject-position shapes the meaning of words, (for example, the meaning of the phrase “abusive behaviour”), and asks researchers to remain curious and respectful of how subjective beings choose to label their experiences (Carter, 2002). This awareness and concern resonates with what Heidegger (1971, cited in Carter, 2002, p.1185) writes: “To undergo an experience with language... means to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into it and not submitting to it”.

This article makes one consider the question of who determines the parameters of ‘abusive behaviour’. The language of labelling can help us come to terms with atrocities inflicted on some people by others. However, the author addresses her uncertainties about what it means to be “abused” and mentions: “I do not feel like the abused or the victim. I do, however, feel that I have been violated. It is not just my body but also my mind, my being” (Carter, 2002, p. 1185). In my research study I often used the word ‘abusive’ in the research interviews with my participants. As the interviewer I need to consider whether I allowed interviewees to name their experiences differently, and also, what assumptions or evaluations I made when participants didn’t choose to define their experiences as ‘abusive’.

Carter’s text (2002) resists simple categories like abuse/abused and victim/perpetrator, and she chooses her words carefully, and at times, with “much consternation”. The author points out that the recollections of her experiences do not knit together in a linear way, much in the same way that abuse is not always linear in all its facets, nor do they weave into a coherent text (as does scholarly discourse). She comments: “it is in the ambiguities and ambivalences that I remain the author of a story that is told alongside the attenuated discourse of the scholars who study “abuse”” (p. 1186).

Carter (2002) allows for textual reflexivity by laying out her text in two parallel columns; the left represents quantitative scholarly works and researched data, whereas the right holds sections of the journal she kept during her abusive relationship. Following each section of research/journal is a section of reflection. All three texts act



together to represent possible intersections between meaning, experience, and thought. The layout of representation of Carter's study (2002) reveals the different quality and nuance of language and meaning-making, and how essential subjective first-person accounts are.

#### ***F.4. Language and the construction of a personal narrative***

Staying with the importance of language in constructing reality, and attending to a focus on 'narrative' in particular, Lempert (1994) presents a detailed narrative analysis of one woman's lived experiences of violence and her transformation of self within a violent intimate relationship. An in-depth interview was conducted with 'Jane', who was asked to 'tell the story' of her relationship. The participant was thus able to construct her narrative in her own terms as she currently understood it, providing her own definitions of abuse and detailing perceived changes in self-regard. Here, narratives are assumed to have an internal logic that makes sense, and narrative analysis considers how this internal logic is manifested in grammatical structures and word choices (Lempert, 1994). By examining the relational story of 'what' Jane said about her particular experiences of violence in an intimate relationship, the analysis simultaneously focuses on 'how' Jane tells her story, how she reconstructs the interactions, events, and participants through the narrative process.

The narrative analysis of Jane's story of her abusive marital relationship situates her as a social psychological actor who apprehended, sustained, and transformed the concepts of violence and of self while interacting with her physical, psychological, social and cultural environment (Lempert, 1994). The focus is on Jane as an active agent constructing over time a series of understandings of the violence that characterises her life, and constructing her own account of her self and of the cumulative explanations of why she stayed and why she should/would leave (Lempert, 1994).

The beginning of Jane's narrative comprises the context within which the couple met, the man was presented, and warnings presaged the violence to come. The middle portion of the narrative incorporates the first violent episode and its contextual frame as well as the period of repetition and escalation of violence. The discussion ends with an analysis of Jane's expressed reasons for remaining in an abusive relationship, and a delineation of three tactics she used to leave the relationship. Jane's narrative, like many

personal stories, is a retrospective reconstruction of her life experiences (Lempert, 1994).

Although the narration of violence is emotionally compelling, it is not the central story that Jane tells. The central story is Jane's transformation of self. Through the vehicle of Jane's narrative, it is possible to track an abused woman's emotionally charged struggle to both accept and reject her abuser's definitions of the situation and her self. Jane presents herself as an active participant in the interactions with her partner, in the development of strategies to halt, change, or cope with the violence that came to characterise her life, and in the constructions and reconstructions of her relationship and her self (Lempert, 1994).

The author attempts to preserve Jane's narratives as essential meaning-making structures and therefore does not fragment the texts. The interest is in seeing how Jane's narrative is constructed and how she rhetorically creates it to make particular points. Attention is given to Jane's use of metaphors and other linguistic tools in creating meaning; the structure and sequence beneath the talk is also attended to. Lempert (1994) employs the interpretive thrust of narrative analysis by looking at how Jane, as protagonist, interprets things, and how as researcher the author can systematically go about interpreting Jane's interpretations. Furthermore, the author's interpretive voice is quite powerful, and reads like a story. However, by presenting long narrative segments of Jane's interview, she allows for possible alternative readings.

The studies discussed in this overall theme of 'Attending to language' have highlighted the importance of researchers being reflexive about how women use language and certain linguistic tools to construct meaning out of their experiences with IPV. The next theme introduces another fundamental issue that requires researcher reflexivity, namely, the role of methodology in the construction of meaning.

### **G. Discourses and constructions of intimate partner violence**

This next theme pulls together studies that attend to how women are socially constructed and narrated as victims of violence. Specifically, the studies explore romantic love discourses and cultural constructions of IPV, and use methodological frameworks that focus on language, narrative and discourse.

### ***G.1. Romantic love discourses***

Several authors have taken a discourse analytic stance in examining women's narratives of IPV (Power, Kralik, Koch, & Jackson, 2006; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000). These authors identify and explore the discourses women employ to explain their understandings of love and violence, and to prevent them from acting against the man's violence. The focus is on how women narrate themselves and their partners' violence, and the role of culturally endorsed gender and romance narratives in normalising violence.

The four studies referenced above (Power et al., 2006; Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000) use a feminist post-structural approach in order to make visible the ways in which women negotiate their identities in the discourses of love and romance. This approach focuses on language, and understands language as emerging from - and constituting - discourses that influence the way we act. Drawing from Foucault's work (1988), discourses are defined as evolving complexes of statements that reflect values, understandings, or meanings specific to certain cultures, contexts or times (Towns & Adams, 2000).

Discourses both govern the way people act, think, and feel, and in turn are constructed by people through language in talk and in action. Discourses may be so woven into talk and culture that people are unaware of their influences, and thus unaware that they are positioned or placed in certain positions by such discourses. Towns and Adams (2000) call these unconscious or conscious positions 'subject-positions': subject positions may be revealed by the way people depict their identities in talk, and some of these positions will be contradictory and in conflict with one another.

Therefore, the basic premise of this type of analysis is that discourses (in this case, perfect love and romantic love discourses) and discursive practices (behaviours culturally ascribed to women in love) provide subject positions, and women take up various subject positions within these different discourses. This approach provides a means of making visible the ways in which women negotiate their identities in the discourses of 'romantic love' (Power et al., 2006; Wood, 2001b) and 'perfect love' (Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000).

Interviews with both adult women (Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000) and older adolescents aged 16-18 years (Jackson, 2001) point to the significance of culturally endorsed constructions of the 'perfect-love'. Both adult women who were recruited from support groups for IPV (Towns & Adams, 2000) and women who had never been in support groups or counselling (and thus not exposed to feminist interventions) (Wood, 2001b), gave accounts that were framed by gender and romance narratives. Women placed themselves within Western culture's primary gender narrative, which casts men as domineering, superior and aggressive, and women as subordinate, forgiving, loyal and accommodating (Wood, 2001a; Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg, & Walker, 1990). Women also relied on romance narratives - which entailed both fairy tale and dark romance versions - to explain and justify the violence in their relationships (Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000).

Towns and Adams (2000) argue that women may be regulated by the positions created for them by perfect-love discourses to remain in the violent relationship, to stay silent about the man's violence, and to attempt to change the man (Towns & Adams, 2000). Similar to the women in Eisikovits and Buchbinders' study (1999) who employed metaphoric descriptions to create a split between the uncontrolled violent partner and the one with whom they live, women across studies constructed a dual understanding of their partners (Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000). By constituting a division between the good and the bad, between who he 'really' was and what he did, the women were able to rationalise violent behaviour as not 'really him'. So, for some women, the real man becomes the good man, whereas the violence becomes something separate from the real person. Maintaining this distinction is therefore likely to maintain women in the violent relationship (Towns & Adams, 2000). Furthermore, women did not hold a partner responsible for violence if they attributed it to factors they constructed as beyond his control (Wood, 2001b). The women thus believed that the violence could be dissociated from the men who enacted it, thus enabling them to continue to love the 'real him' (Wood, 2001b).

To make sense of the violence, women drew on a number of conflicting and contradictory invocations of love, suggesting the influence of certain discourses of the perfect-love. Towns and Adams (2000) give discursive examples of love - giving love, possessive love, redeeming love, and nurturing love - all of which were used to resource perfect-love discourses.

Women across studies employed a nurturing-caring love as the linguistic resource to describe their actions (Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000). While heroines of romantic fiction want to be loved and cared for, they are also the providers of that love and care (Jackson, 2001). Certainly, a particularly prominent indicator of women's acceptance of the established gender narrative was their internalisation of the expectation that women should care for and please their partners (Wood, 2001b).

Women's accounts pointed to the seductive nature of nurturing love discourses that position the man as vulnerable and lonely and the woman as providing the love and nurturance that will help him. Women narrated themselves as being responsible for comforting men who had beaten them and understanding the frustrations that 'drove' men to violence (Wood, 2001b). It has been argued that some women gain their sense of identity by holding relationships together, and thus rescuing the 'injured prince' is one way for women to maintain such connections (Walker & Goldner, 1995, cited in Towns & Adams, 2000).

That the woman might be responsible for the man's violence emerged strongly in women's accounts that drew on the notion of possessive love (Towns & Adams, 2000) and the 'dark romance' narrative (Wood, 2001b). This script claims that it is normal for men to have 'bad spells', and thus normal for romantic relationships to be hurtful to women (Wood, 2001b). The woman partner is blamed for doing something that elicits the man's violence, thus the violence against her suggests that the onus falls on the woman to ensure that her partner is not driven to violence (Towns & Adams, 2000). Many women believed that they deserved the violence, and blamed themselves for the violence they experienced (Wood, 2001b). They attributed violence to themselves, their actions or inactions. A second form of self-blame was to believe violence was motivated by the partners' desire to help them overcome failings or punish them for bad behaviour. Similar to the theme of control prevalent in abused women's metaphoric descriptions in Eisikovits and Buchbinders' study (1999), women across studies believed that they could control or stop the violence (Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000). Similarly, a grounded theory study with young women (mean age 21 years) showed that these illusions of control were part of the web of entrapment; women kept hoping that, if they persevered, they could make the relationship work (Rosen, 1996).

Women recalled initially perceiving their relationships as fairy tale romances, complete with an adoring Prince Charming. Fairy tale views of romance were also revealed in women's desire to make a 'good catch'. Prince Charming is supposed to be handsome, potentially successful and someone parents approve of and friends admire or envy. Tying in with the perfect-love discourse (Towns & Adams, 2000), the fairy tale narrative does not preclude problems, but it does maintain that love can conquer any hardship (Wood, 2001b).

Similarly, in Rosen's (1996) grounded theory study, romantic fantasies and romantic fusion emerged as two themes central to the women's initial process of seduction. Enticed by romantic fantasies, these women became locked into fused relationships with their boyfriends. Their fusion marked the beginning of their loss of independence and sense of self as separate from their boyfriends. The women described relationships in which their needs (including safety and security) and self-interests became subsumed by and, to some extent, synonymous with their relationships. These relationships often became intense quickly, and the majority of energy was spent devoted to the relationship (Rosen, 1996).

Young women's stories of their relationships with abusive boyfriends bore little resemblance to the happy-ever-after fairy tale romance. Fairy tale beginnings promised hope of the "perfect" relationship but progressed into plots of emotional abuse, sexual coercion or physical violence (Jackson, 2001). As found elsewhere (Few & Rosen, 2005; Rosen, 1996), several young women became involved with abusive boyfriends at a time when they were experiencing vulnerable life circumstances, for instance family problems, stressful life events, or when they had become estranged from friends (Jackson, 2001). These vulnerabilities seemed to place the women in a position to become seduced by romantic fantasies and to rely on their relationships for comfort. When the boyfriend appealed to, addressed, or seemed to mend the women's unique vulnerability, she became seduced by what Rosen (1996) calls the 'Cinderella fantasy'.

Conversely, fairy tale stories such as 'The Frog Prince' or 'Beauty and the Beast' provide cultural representations of the injured prince who requires a perfect-love that will mend his vulnerabilities and transform him. The beast in the prince is not depicted as a fundamental flaw in the nature or behaviour of the prince but rather as a temporary appearance that can be changed by a princess who is capable of showing true love.

Fundamentally, he is the perfect prince, but to discover this, she must prove that she can make the sacrifices that no other princess has been capable of making. These fairy stories have powerful parallels in the narratives of women across studies who have experienced violence from their partners. In the women's narratives, the man's violence was not considered to indicate that the man was a beast but rather that the man had a problem that the woman could assist him to resolve. Her solution was to persist in being the perfect partner and to provide him with the perfect love so that the violence in him would no longer emerge (Towns & Adams, 2000). For example, older adolescents found explanations for their boyfriends' abusive behaviour (e.g. his 'hard life' and his being 'very screwed up') that served as reasons invoking their sympathy regarding his 'problem' (Jackson, 2001). Similarly, young women were touched by and drawn to their boyfriends' vulnerability, and would become seduced by the illusion that they had the power to transform or heal him (Rosen, 1996). Women seduced by this 'Beauty and the Beast' fantasy seemed to be under the illusion that they could be the ones who could save their boyfriends from their insecurities or mold them into kind and sensitive partners (Rosen, 1996). It is also a familiar romantic narrative where it is 'natural' for heroines to suffer, to endure pain, in the name of love (Jackson, 1993a). Behind this discursive formula is a certain judgement of women whose partners continue to use violence against them: that they cannot be loving them well enough and that they should try harder (Towns & Adams, 2000). Nevertheless, in finding explanations for men's abusive behaviour in this way, women are able to gain at least some degree of control (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999) and intimacy.

Towns and Adams (2000) suggest that discourses of the perfect-love may act to bind women in relationships with men who use violence against them through scripting women to love better in order to stop the violence. Perfect-love discourses therefore open the way to interpreting the man's continuing violence as the woman's responsibility through her failure to provide perfect-love. Jackson (1993b) argues that romantic fantasy, whether it be in fairy tales or in other forms of popular culture, provides young women with 'texts of meanings' of femininity and heterosexuality that they may draw on to understand and interpret their place in the social world. Post-structuralism would thus suggest that there are multiple socially constructed depictions of love and of the identities of those in love that women must first resist if they are to leave a man who uses violence against them (Towns & Adams, 2000). "When confronted with a partner who hurts them, women cannot easily fit their experience

within the central romance narrative offered by the culture. Thus, they are motivated to discover some way to make sense of what is not sensible” (Wood, 2001b, p.242). In their attempts to respond to the incoherence of partner violence, women need to find new ways of narrating themselves and their experiences.

It is important to note that although the older adolescents sometimes portrayed themselves as passive heroines in their stories, they did not settle comfortably within this positioning. Rather, they struggled with competing positions, and resisted the positioning of themselves as victims. Avoidance of victim status also incorporated not labelling boyfriends as abusers and/or not labelling the experience (at the time of the relationship) as abusive (Jackson, 2001). In some girls’ stories, the boyfriend was constituted as the needy, emotionally out of control hero, qualities more generally assigned to female characters and to femininity; and the girls represented themselves as the assertive and knowing heroine (Jackson, 2001). Lamb (1999) argues that there is every disincentive in Western culture to disavow the label of victim which carries with it shame and humiliation and the risk of being viewed as irresponsible and whining.

Through a secondary analysis of 20 Australian women’s narratives of recovery from IPV, Power and colleagues (2006) also enable the problematisation of the cultural discourse of ‘romantic love’ as it relates to IPV. Though some women knew about IPV and recognised the early cues as such, they rationalised the behaviour and reconstructed it in order to make it more acceptable. Two positions within the discourse of romantic love were identified that underpinned their desires to establish and invest in the relationship despite the presence of IPV; these were ‘desperate for a man’ and interpreting jealousy as a sign of love (Power et al., 2006).

The desire, expectation and social pressure to be in a romantic relationship resulted in women feeling anxious and desperate to achieve it. The author references the popular ‘Bridget Jones’ movies as examples of this compulsion (Power et al., 2006). Thus, in order for women to feel age and gender appropriate, they feel driven to be in a relationship with a man. So, when violence occurs within the context of a romantic relationship, the romantic belief that love will overcome all obstacles can collude with a woman’s desperation to be part of a romantic relationship, and can act as a powerful motivator for overlooking cues for IPV and remaining in the relationship (Power et al., 2006).



The participants in this study identified jealousy as an early feature of their romantic relationships: men attempted to control who women spent time with, what activities they participated in, and were threatened by any contact women had with other men. Power and colleagues (2006) argue that, in the romantic storyline, these jealous and possessive behaviours can be experienced as positive signs of love, caring and protection.

In summary, the discourse of romantic love is both seductive and compelling (Power et al., 2006; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000). From an early age young women are inducted into the narrative of romantic love, commencing with fairytales through to teen romance novels, movies and magazines (Davies, 1989, cited in Power et al., 2006). Therefore, women may not recognise early cues for IPV because they are invested in idealistic notions about romantic relationships.

Furthermore, Rosen's (1996) study alerts to the fact that, for many young women, abuse within a premarital relationship does not necessarily mean that the relationship will end. Rather, seduction and entrapment processes emerge as forces that tend to galvanise their commitment to these relationships despite the onset of abuse. Thus, despite the absence of many of the barriers to leaving abusive relationships experienced by married women, the ties that bind young women to their premarital violent relationships are equally as powerful (Rosen, 1996).

The above studies underscore the need for researchers and interventionists to examine their own critical thinking about women who experience violence from their partners, in order to determine how the positions they constitute for women are influenced by perfect-love and other discourses. Educating young women to think critically about the ways in which perfect-love discourses may be employed to hold women accountable when violence emerges in a relationship offers young women the opportunity to take up alternative positions that resist blame when men use violence against them (Towns & Adams, 2000).

These studies illustrate that the romantic narrative is undoubtedly a powerful and salient cultural resource. Some young women draw on both narratives of fairy tale romance and empowering feminist narratives (Jackson, 2001; Rosen, 1996). Nevertheless, Wood (2001b) argues that the gendered romance narratives currently legitimated in Western

culture offer insufficient stories of individuals and relationships, and constrain both men and women. They beg for revision and remaking. Fisher (1987, cited in Wood, 2001b) insists that humans are capable of creating or accepting new narratives when those they have grown up believing no longer suffice to explain or guide their lives. People have the ability “to formulate and adopt new stories that better account for their lives” (Fisher, 1987, cited in Wood, 2001). Yet composing alternative and healthier romance narratives requires more than personal creativity. Since narratives are rooted in the larger culture, cultural structures and practices must participate vigorously in authorising and supporting new romance narratives- ones that narrate violence as unacceptable in intimate relationships (Wood, 2001b).

### ***G.2. Cultural constructions of IPV***

Research on violence against women, conducted in both Western and non-Western societies, have underscored the importance of exploring the cultural constructions that inform women’s narratives of IPV.

For instance, Tang and Cheung (2002) explored how women are socially constructed and narrated as legitimate victims of violence in Chinese societies. This study draws on feminist social constructionist arguments in viewing violence against women as a social phenomenon best understood by examining how myths and victim-blaming attitudes are constructed. Focus group discussions were conducted with men and women in 3 Chinese societies, namely Hong Kong, Beijing (PRC) and Taipei (Taiwan).

Similar to findings of Western studies, the authors found that Chinese tend to use psychiatric explanations in their explanations and discussions of violence against women, and believe that men who commit violence are ‘sick’ or controlled by their impulses. Participants employed these psychiatric explanations to depict perpetrators as victims who suffered childhood trauma, were betrayed by people they trusted (mothers and girlfriends), or were bullied by women (sisters, wives and female bosses). They are seen as victims who lack love and thus do not know how to love. Participants’ psychiatric explanations were not directly related to victim blaming; nevertheless, they absolve perpetrators from full responsibility by focusing on the role of women in creating men’s hatred and propensity for violence against women (Tang & Cheung, 2002).

The social script of love not only justified men's acts of violence but sometimes romanticised them in moving tales. Male participants were more likely to endorse these love scripts than women. However, despite the prevalence of these discourses in Chinese societies, they are not fixed or resistant to change. Some young and educated Chinese participants rejected various cultural myths, opposed victim-blaming explanations, and disrupted pro-violence social scripts (Tang & Cheung, 2002).

Maintaining the focus on how cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity inform women's narratives of violence, Boonzaier and De la Rey (2003) examine how South African women's reconstructions of violence either resist or sanction hegemonic gendered norms. They also attend to how women construct and give meaning to their experiences within a South African sociohistorical and cultural context. The participants were 15 women who resided in Mitchell's Plain, South Africa.

Similar to the studies on perfect-love and romantic-love discourses (Power et al., 2006; Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000), this article employs a feminist post-structuralist approach in its understanding of gender and violence. Issues of language and subjectivity are thus central (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003). The concept of subjectivity, which acknowledges multiplicity, contradiction, and fluidity, is posited as an alternative to the more traditional psychological concept of 'identity' which is critiqued as static and unitary. A poststructural approach acknowledges that there are multiple interpretations of any given situation, and these are contingent on the discourses available to an individual at particular socio-historical or cultural moments. Thus, the ways a woman will respond to and experience abuse are linked to her access to multiple ways of understanding, such as her self-concept, beliefs about gender roles and identities and beliefs about marriage and family life (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

The interview data in this study were analysed using a form of narrative analysis, taking participants' stories as the objects of investigation. Adopting the analytical approach posited by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998, cited in Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003) called 'holistic-content analysis', women's narratives were read by attending to the foci of their stories, while attempting to be open to the meaning of the texts. The interview transcripts were read many times, paying particular attention first to the content of women's narratives. Similarities and differences across and within cases were explicated. Furthermore, the attention to language and discourse shaped the authors'

readings of women's narratives. In line with a poststructural view of language, the authors were attentive to the discourses women used to give meaning to their experiences. In their article, the authors focus on those discourses that exemplify gender constructions and identity (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

All participants in the study named their partners' actions as abuse. The abuse ranged from subtle verbal degradation, humiliation, or controlling behaviour to sexual violence and severe physical abuse. Women's abilities to name the abuse they experienced may have been linked to greater public awareness around issues of violence against women (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003). The women in this study also recognised that their husbands' abuse was aimed at exerting power and maintaining control in their relationships. By attending to discourses of power and control, the authors illustrate how power in abusive relationships is not always unidirectional and shifts according to changes in the relationship, women's social conditions, and subjectivity (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

Similar to the findings of previous studies in this section (Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000), the splitting off of the good and bad was also evident. The bad is described as being located dormant inside the individual and erupting as a result of disequilibrium. Resembling the findings of Eisikovits and Buchbinder's study (1999), violence in this respect is viewed as an expressive release of tension, driven by internal, impulsive forces. In some cases, the eruption may be caused by anger or the consumption of alcohol. Violence, therefore, is characterised as a form of disruption from the normal state. Alcohol was often described as the cause of the disruption: he lets "alcohol control him"; "he waits till the alcohol talks" – these statements imply a loss of control on the abusers' part. These characterisations also serve to create a split between the "sober/good husband" and the "drunk/beast" (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003). Describing violence as a loss of control, and by describing their husbands as "normally" good, women represent the violence as a departure from the norm. This allows women to acknowledge the violence but also the non-violent and sometimes loving characteristics of their partners. In their descriptions, women resist constructing their husbands as holistically abusive and themselves as victims. This dual identity construction, whereby women create a split between the good and bad persona, was also identified in a later study with South African women (Boonzaier, 2008).

In this study, women either adopted or resisted feminine constructions of the “good woman/wife”. In line with the gendered romance narrative that emerged in the previous studies (Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000), many women in this study believed that a “good” woman or wife should adopt nurturing and caring roles, particularly in response to her partner’s abusiveness. Hegemonic feminine norms were also sanctioned by social and institutional systems. Women sought assistance from a number of sources, including the criminal justice system, social service agencies, the family, and religious institutions. These institutions reinforced male violence by not providing women with proper assistance and sometimes blaming them for the abuse. The family also played a dual role and either supported women or minimised or colluded with the abuse. Women were frequently advised to reconcile with their husbands. Standards of femininity as nurturing, caring and reconciliatory were thereby reinforced (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

For many women, issues of economic power and control were central. These concerns reflected aspects of the socioeconomic environment and women’s everyday struggles and lived realities in Mitchell’s Plain. For some participants who were employed outside the home, their identification as working women was an important aspect of their identities. Because of the periodic nature of their husbands’ work, and their financial responsibilities, several women had to ensure that they maintained their jobs, and thus invested a lot of time and energy in their work. Women’s identifications as responsible, independent, and able were a source of pride and increased self-worth. In this manner, some women were able to exert a degree of control over their lives and feel a sense of confidence and self-respect. However, these constructions were also a site of tension for some whose husbands’ abuse was aimed at breaking them down or minimising their power. Accounts of how men used material possessions to exert control were common to all participants. They described how their partners claimed exclusive ownership to, or threatened to remove, jointly owned possessions (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

Often, women’s salaries were inadequate to maintain the household, themselves and their children without contributions from their partners. Once again, their partners used the degree of economic dependence as an opportunity to reassert their economic power in the relationship. The women in this study also highlighted a somewhat unique form of economic abuse, where their partners burdened them with the sole responsibility for

the family. Many women had to assume the responsibility of finding accommodations for their families (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

Due partly to high levels of poverty and unemployment, drug abuse is a serious problem in Mitchell's Plain. Many women disclosed the difficulties of living with a partner who abused alcohol or drugs, and economic issues were at the forefront of their narratives. Men became extremely aggressive and sometimes violent when they could not obtain money to purchase alcohol or drugs (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

Women drew on varied discourses and took up various subject positions at different moments in their narratives. In their stories, women invoked the past, discussed the present, and expressed concerns and hopes about their futures. Their narratives encompassed change. Many women's narratives cohered around a recurring theme: determination to overcome the abuse (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003). Shifts in identity facilitated changes in women's use of strategies to deal with the violence. After numerous promises of change and vacillations between periods of calm, some participants seemed to be grappling with their partners' behaviour, questioning aspects of themselves and their relationships. An awareness of changes in women's sense of self was the impetus for gaining a modicum of power and control in the relationships (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

In contrast to discourses of the perfect-love, many women - along with a shifting consciousness about the abuse - either described feelings of hatred or a lack of affection for their partners. Subject positions of being loving, caring and nurturing were adopted at the beginning of the relationships but changed as a consequence of abuse. This study shows how women change as they respond to violence from their partners. These changes could be positive and allow women to gain a measure of power and control in their relationships (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003).

By attending to women's talk about violence, the authors showed how the participants either took up or resisted hegemonic constructions of femininity and masculinity. In their narratives, women evoked conflicting and shifting constructions of themselves and their partners and challenged gender-stereotypical roles in many ways. An acknowledgement of agency and resistance permits the revisioning of the traditional script that depicts women as passive and helpless victims of patriarchy and other

structural forces (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003). However, in their attempt to draw attention to agency, negotiation, and resistance in abusive relationships, the authors alert the reader to the dangers of neglecting structural constraints based in oppressive social conditions (Davis & Fisher, 1993, cited in Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003). Their analysis attempts to acknowledge a dialogue between these standpoints.

The meanings the authors attach to the narrative segments in this study are strongly influenced by their feminist framework and concepts of gendered identities. Although this somewhat obscures other possible readings, the authors, as narrative researchers, do acknowledge that theirs is but one of many possible readings of the data. Furthermore, although the authors view the formation of the data as a co-construction between researchers and researched, they do not explicitly incorporate this issue into their analysis.

### ***G.3. Relational constructions of woman abuse***

As I've mentioned earlier, there have been recent arguments for researchers to focus on how both men and women construct their violent relationships in order to better understand the relational construction and basis of partner violence (Allison et al., 2008; Boonzaier, 2008). In a narrative analysis study with 15 South African heterosexual couples, Boonzaier (2008) examined how men and women in intimate relationships characterised by men's violence constructed stories about violence and the relationship in relation to the other partner. Using a feminist post-structuralist framework, the author explores how men and women understand and talk about the violence in their relationships. The results illustrate how structural and social factors impact on the discursive construction of relationships, gender and violence, as well as on the subjective construction of identities. In South Africa, it is understood that transformation at political, social and economic levels will have implications for the ways in which interpersonal, heterosexual relationships are constructed and narrated.

Participants in this study constructed a blurring of the roles of 'victim' and 'perpetrator', and took up differing subject positions at particular moments to achieve varied purposes. Consistent with traditional femininity, many women fully situated themselves within the role of the victim and their partners often concurred. At the beginning of the violence, women came to view themselves in the position of 'the wounded' (Hydén, 2005), and described themselves as passive and helpless victims.

However, possibilities for agency and resistance were found in the strategies women employed to end the violence in their relationships – thereby resisting traditional forms of femininity as passive and submissive.

Many of the men resisted the label of ‘perpetrator’, and used their narratives to illustrate their transformation as individuals. These men made efforts to maintain a positive sense of self despite their violent histories. Therefore, men brought a specific agenda to the research encounter, and constructed narratives to show that they were in actual fact not violent. Many men used the narrative of ‘emasculatation’ or ‘crisis’ (Boonzaier, 2005) and constructed themselves in the position of victim or ‘the wounded’.

Men used particular strategies to characterise their partners as domineering, such as positioning themselves as victims. Women who were controlling made it difficult for men to hold on to the hegemonic forms of masculinity (Boonzaier, 2008). Similarly, in another study (Flinck et al., 2008), men whose masculinity was criticised and challenged by their female partners felt indirectly abused. These men felt unable to confidently claim ownership of their masculine roles, and felt nullified by the altered values of the women in their lives. In both these studies, men used violence to attain the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, and used narratives of emasculatation to explain away their violence towards their partners.

Notably, for the participants in the South African study, the language of psychology was often used to ‘explain’ violence in their relationships (Boonzaier, 2008). In particular, a man’s childhood history of violence or dysfunctional relationships was presented as a precursor to his current violent behaviour. The popular discourse on the intergenerational transmission of violence encouraged men to make connections between their current behaviour and contextual factors in their families of origin.

Participants described relationships characterised by constant conflict. These individuals constructed narratives of mutuality and responsibility – constructing violence as a dual, reciprocal activity – where the man’s violence was expressive. However, the man’s violence was also understood as instrumental in claiming power and control. This intention to control was also highlighted in women’s narrations of sexual coercion and violation (Boonzaier, 2008).



In summary, the women's and men's talk about violence and relationships provided insight into the subjective, relational and gendered dynamics of abusive relationships. By acknowledging gender as a relational dynamic, this study offers a broader and more dynamic understanding of woman abuse. Furthermore, by using a narrative analytical method that attends to the functions of narratives, the analysis underscored the significance of the context in shaping the ways in which experiences were narrated. Importantly, Boonzaier (2008) also includes a positional reflexivity in her readings of the data.

### **H. Coping with and surviving intimate partner violence**

There were several articles in the review that attended to how women cope with and survive intimate partner violence relationships. These studies show that women are helped in their coping by social support and relationships, self-awareness, spirituality, religiosity and factors promoting integrity, faith and orientation towards the future (Yick, 2008; Flinck, Paavilainen, & Astedt-Kurki, 2005; Taylor, 2004; Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Davis, 2002a; Patzel, 2001).

The complex role religion and spirituality may play as a source of both strength and vulnerability was highlighted in studies with Finnish (Flinck et al., 2005) and American Muslim women (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003). Religiousness was a factor that involved commitment to the couple relationship, made religious demands on women and yet also promoted the recovery of integrity (Flinck et al., 2005). Although a sustaining force for many, spirituality was also a source of vulnerability for women who found their ability to resist abuse impaired by spiritual beliefs that promoted passivity and compliance (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). A metasynthesis of qualitative findings on the role of spirituality and religiosity among culturally diverse domestic violence survivors (Yick, 2008) identified a theme of strength and resilience across studies, however, the authors also identified a theme of tension stemming from religious definition of family and gender-role expectations.

Certainly, literature on the topic of spirituality and coping with intimate partner violence suggests that belief systems that provide survivors with a sense of meaning and purpose and a reason to hope afford considerable support to survivors during difficult times (Farrell, 1996a). Conversely, belief systems that blame survivors, support abusers, and

promote secrecy may create additional trauma and impede women's ability to resist and recover from abuse (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Friedli, 1999). Certainly, women in abusive relationships have recognised the silence of religious institutions in addressing intimate partner violence. In one study, clergy were not helpful in alleviating abused women's spiritual distress or intervening in the violence (Copel, 2008).

Women across studies described inner resources for surviving abusive experiences and developing ways to protect themselves in future relationships. These resources were identified in themes of resiliency, increased self-awareness and self-determination (Farrell, 1996b); strength, survival and self-protection (Yick, 2008; Davis, 2002a); agency and self-efficacy (Oke, 2008; Patzel, 2001); and the cultivation of intuition (Davis, 2002a). Taylor (2004) identified an overarching process of survivorship-thriving, reflecting African American women's ability to thrive and move past mere survival during their recovery of abusive relationships. The actions and choices that supported women included: sharing information about the abuse with others; reclaiming the self and defining oneself separate from abuser and society; nurturing and renewing the spiritual self; forgiving their partners for the abuse and violence; finding inspiration in the future; and engaging in social activism (Taylor, 2004). During this process of moving from surviving to thriving the women asked questions more central to self-definition, and spoke about recovering self as key to their ability to remain independent and strong, and outside of unhealthy relationships (Taylor, 2004).

The theme of re-discovering oneself as central to the process of recovery has also been identified in other studies (Oke, 2008; Smith, 2003; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001; Farrell, 1996b). For instance, in their attempts to emotionally separate from their abusive partner, and to leave the relationship, Black college women describe a process of self-empowerment through reclaiming self through spirituality, rebuilding self-esteem, reconnecting with social networks, validating their personal needs and desires, processing life lessons from the relationship and leaving the abusive partner completely (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002).

Similarly, in a study that explored the lived experience of healing in women who were recovering from abusive relationships (Farrell, 1996b), the participants experienced healing as a journey towards self-realisation. Leaving the relationships only removed the external threat; the participants described a much deeper internal threat to the self

that resulted in a fragmentation of the sense of self. Reconnecting the fragments of self by putting into perspective the past experiences of abuse led to the development of a sense of wholeness for the women (Farrell, 1996b).

Across studies, women used diverse ways of coping, surviving and protecting self, often personifying courage and survival. This, Davis (2002) argues, offers a contrast to the stereotype of a dysfunctional, helpless victim. Women increased their sense of personal power and agency through seeking out opportunities for self-education (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Patzel, 2001), self-reflection and expression (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Patzel, 2001); increased self-awareness and empowerment (Farrell, 1996b), identity change (Oke, 2008) and engagement in social activism (Taylor, 2004; Taylor, 2002). This increase in self-efficacy helped clarify their thoughts, support their desire for change, and increased their belief in their ability to successfully take action in their best interests (Patzel, 2001).

Participating in research about abusive intimate relationships was identified as an act of resistance and healing by African American women (Taylor, 2002). Coming to terms with the pervasiveness of IPV fostered a sense of connectedness and social responsibility, and this supported their efforts to speak out, talk back, and participate in telling their stories via research interviews. For many women, participation in the research was a symbolic way of talking back to the men who abused them and to social structures that attempted to maintain them in positions of silence and subjugation. This study with African American women suggests that participation in narrative research about violence might be a less visible form of political activism, yet an equally important form of resistance (Taylor, 2002).

Similarly, the value of feminist, qualitative, cross-cultural and narrative research has been highlighted in a study with Mongolian and Australian women (Oke, 2008). Most of the women focused on personal or identity change as a main theme or plot of their story of 'remaking of self'. In both cases, recovery involved reconnecting within themselves and with others, and rejecting old patriarchal beliefs. Power and agency were crucial aspects of the women's stronger narrative identities.

In summary, research has shown that internal resources help women to believe in - and sustain - themselves emotionally throughout the process of surviving - , leaving - and

recovering from – their abusive relationships. Outside resources and both formal/informal support systems, especially when coupled with women's personal strengths and inner resources, are seen as contributing to and enhancing women's abilities for decision making in abusive relationships (Patzel, 2001).

### **I. Help-seeking behaviours of women in abusive relationships**

This theme attends to what women in violent relationships do when they reach out to others for assistance, and considers what kind of help is experienced as helpful to these women. Help-seeking has been defined as the disclosure of victimisation in an effort to obtain some form of assistance (Morrison, Luchok, Richter, & Parra-Medina, 2006). In a grounded theory study with 22 'battered' women, Matar Curnow (1997) identified a period of help-seeking and reality behaviours by women occurring within the cycle of violence. According to the author's theory, there is an 'Open Window Phase' during which women recognise that they are victims of violence and that they are unable to stop the violence directed at them. During this period of cognitive reasoning, awareness, and understanding of the relationship, women are most likely to reach out for help and to be receptive to alternatives and interventions. It is argued that if an abused woman receives validation of what she is feeling about her situation, and can develop a meaning that is shared by others, she will be able to leave the relationship (Matar Curnow, 1997; Landenburger, 1989).

However, many factors can constrain abused women from seeking support, such as being faced with cultural and societal sanctions against leaving the relationship, and feeling cautious and insecure when relating to others or forging new relationships (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Rose, Campbell, & Kub, 2000). Research with Black women has identified how external issues such as racism and other class and social disparities might discourage some Black women from enlisting intervention (Nash, 2005). It has been suggested that African American women are socialised not to seek help from outside the black community to avoid bringing further disgrace and suffering onto the black male by the wider society (Moss, Pitula, Campbell, & Halstead, 1997). Black women have described an obligation to act as Black men's caretakers, whether by protecting their masculinity, social image, and the life chances of their Black sons or by responding through a sense of religious duty (Nash, 2005). Thus, having a raced and gendered construction of abusive relationships can prove to be problematically selfless

(Nash, 2005). Nevertheless, despite a range of obstacles, most women use some form of help in making decisions about their relationships, whether from family or friends or outside resources (Davis, 2002b).

One study showed a prominent difference between African American and White women in abusive relationships concerning the role of support services in the community.

African American women in urban and rural settings had limited or negative experiences with social institutions such as shelters, and were much more inclined to discuss support from family and friends in ending the abusive relationship (Short et al., 2000). Rose and colleagues (2000) found that African-American women used female friends for support more often than family members, and that family members, especially parents, were not consistently seen as useful sources of support. In another study Black college women reported that, rather than seek help from formal sources - such as therapists, they preferred to disclose the abuse to their mothers or peers (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002). Although disclosing to friends provided some solace, many of their female friends were also involved in abusive dating relationships; some male friends were unhelpful, and positioned themselves to be future dating partners (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002).

In interviews with African-American women, Morrison and colleagues (2006) explored the perceived costs and benefits of help-seeking that abused African-American women weigh before they disclose their abuse. Participants perceived their informal networks as willing to offer instrumental support (i.e. tangible assistance); family and friends were forthcoming with certain aid and services such as child care, transportation and shelter. Furthermore, families in particular were useful in attempting to provide guidance, advice and direction to participants. However, informal networks were not always emotionally supportive; family and friends often demonstrated frustration and/or lack of empathy, and were hesitant to get directly involved in the victim's personal affairs. Friends in particular would also offer advice that was inappropriate, possibly implying a general unfamiliarity with the dynamics and consuming nature of violent relationships. Finally, the stigma and anticipated judgemental response to being a victimised African-American woman was a hindrance to help-seeking among participants. The women discussed how their fear of being labelled, ridiculed, criticised and/or belittled by family and friends for being in an abusive relationship made them hesitant to broach the topic with their networks (Morrison et al., 2006).

The primary help seeking strategy identified by women across studies is simply telling others about the abuse in their relationships. A study with 130 female university students who had experienced dating violence found that 92% of participants told at least one person, most frequently a friend, sister, and mother (Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993). Participants found responses of understanding and emotional reassurance to be more helpful than any other kind of support, such as interrogation or 'lecturing'. While participants expressed a need for advice and help with decision-making, it was important to them that people listened first and that they made the decisions themselves. The belief that the abusive incident was a private matter - and feelings of embarrassment - were the two major reasons for not telling intimate network members (Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993).

Focus groups that explored the informal and formal helping strategies of female college sorority members also identified a barrier of silence to the disclosure of relationship violence (Anderson & Danis, 2007). Although undergraduate college participants acknowledged that relationship violence may happen to any woman, they still associated stigma and embarrassment with the subject. Furthermore, the study identified a lack of knowledge, experience and intervention regarding the issue of relationship violence as it applies to college sororities. Although participants felt it was more likely that informal helping strategies would be used before approaching more formal services, leaders within the informal network of sororities did not express having the comfort, knowledge or skill levels to address the issue (Anderson & Danis, 2007).

In a study with women in outreach groups, Lempert (1997b) focused on these informal help-seeking overtures of women, and considered the unintended consequences of these overtures. Locked into definitional dialogues with their partners, it was difficult for women to develop other perspectives. In their attempts to control the violence and find new conceptual frames to explain it, abused women sought help by talking about their experiences with others (Lempert, 1997b). Telling was a significant social act because it made public their "fictions of intimacy" (Tifft, 1993, cited in Lempert, 1997), affected the women's own perceptions of their relationships, and altered others' definitions of them and their partners.

Most respondents stated clearly that initially in telling others they were not trying to leave. Through the stories they told themselves and others, they sought assistance that

would help them make sense of, justify, and legitimate their continuing efforts in the relationships. Their narrations reflected the failures of the binary model of abuse conceptualisation, the either/or of staying/leaving, to adequately capture the complexity of these intimate interactions (Lempert, 1997b).

In the beginning, the women denied and/or discounted others' definitions of their relationships as "abusive", their partners as "batterers", and themselves as "victims", and resisted these stigmatising identities. Further dissonance developed because others often held orientations of the violent events as unambiguous assaults requiring immediate action to ensure safety, while the women held orientations bred in the ambiguity of love and violence and predicated on commitment and their partners' promises of change. In part, because help providers often reduced the complexity of intimate relationships to incidents of violence, well-intentioned help provision frequently had unintended negative consequences. It was not necessarily the help women wanted and the assistance was often based on a definitional contingency, or acceptance of others' definitions of the situations and others' prescriptions for action. This contingency placed the women in the same relation to the supporters as they were to the abusers, that is, others controlled the definitions of their experiences and their identities (Lempert, 1997b).

Power and the ability to define are intimately related, that is, those with personal and/or social power can create and impose their definitions of the situation on others. These respondents reported vying with both their partners and their help providers over the power to define themselves and their intimate relationships. In contradictory arenas, they struggled for control of the definitions of their experiences (Lempert, 1997b).

These women wanted support for their particular ascriptions of meaning; therefore, to be experienced as helpful, the meanings negotiated had to include the women's own interpretations of their experiences. Survival depended on continued and creative use of whatever personal powers they possessed, even if it was only the power to remain in the relationship (Lempert, 1997b).

This study shows that when abused women's experiences and the meanings they attach to them are available to formal and informal helpers, understanding can be generated and tolerance expanded. With a better understanding of how abused women interpret their experiences and how well-intentioned assistance efforts can produce negative

consequences, one can better develop applied interventions to address both immediate needs, as identified by the women, and broader issues for social change (Lempert, 1997b).

Although Lempert (1997b) uses grounded theory methodology, she also attends to the structure of the narratives: in most cases, the respondents' retelling was episodic and provided significant insights into the history of their own developing awareness of the scope of the problem (Lempert, 1997b). It is also important to note that gender appeared to be most salient in the narratives of these women, that is, their victimisation as female partners appeared to transcend issues of race and/or ethnicity.

In line with the one of the foci of my research methodology, the above study highlights the importance of attending to the telling moment or the narrating activity, and considering what personal investments women have in constructing their stories in particular ways. The focus is thus on how women in interaction with an audience choose to tell their stories in order to achieve certain interactional and presentational goals.

### **J. Leaving abusive relationships**

Most of those constructing the problem of intimate violence have attempted and continue to attempt to explain "why battered women stay", providing a variety of accounts/reasons for this problematic behaviour (Dunn, 2005) or "deviance" (Loseke & Cahill, 1984, cited in Dunn, 2005). However, the legitimacy of this enquiry itself has been pointed out to be problematic since it can be perceived as an additional way of blaming the woman 'victim' and leading to secondary victimisation (Eisikovits et al., 1998). Similarly, the question 'why doesn't she leave?' has an undertone of criticism of its victim: a woman who stays with a man who abuses her cannot be normal (Hydén, 1999). This depiction of battered women as staying in or returning to their violent relationships violates the normative expectation that people ordinarily act in their own best interests, and rests on the assumption that they are free to do so (Dunn, 2005).

Leisenring (2006) points out that although theories that explicitly blame abused women by suggesting that they cause IPV are uncommon today, a tendency to focus on women's decisions to leave or stay in their abusive relationships is still evident. The



assumption that there are simple either/or solutions to the complex problem of being in a violent relationship (Brown, 1997, cited in Eisikovits et al., 1998), creates the assumption that abused women who live with their partners have two dichotomised options: to stay and know that the violence will continue and to accept it, or to leave the relationship as the only way to stop the violence and become re-empowered. This focus on “exit” implicitly holds women responsible for ending the violence in their relationships; if they fail to do so they are seen as ultimately at fault for the future violence they may experience (Leisenring, 2006).

Accordingly, as pointed out by Eisikovits and colleagues (1998), many writers have assumed that the decision to leave is the turning point for abused women. Notwithstanding the importance of such a decision, it is however not the sole avenue by which abused women can arrive at a turning point. Focusing on leaving as an outcome measure also misses the potential inner changes women undergo while attempting to free themselves from abuse (Brown, 1997, cited in Eisikovits et al., 1998).

Adding to the above argument, Hydén (1999) is of the opinion that a ‘battered’ woman in fact does *not* stay: in her mind, she leaves immediately. For some women, the violent situation ends with them physically leaving - temporarily or permanently. For others, the break-up is psychological - the woman removes herself from the situation in her mind and makes herself unreachable psychologically. Interviews with women who had left their abusers revealed that, prior to the decision to leave, there was a period when the women endured by withdrawing. Outwardly, they tried to be as passive as possible in order to avoid conflict, but their inner activity and dialogue was considerable (Hydén, 1999).

This theme of ‘leaving abusive relationships’ clearly encompasses many important issues of enquiry, which I’ll address under the following sub-themes: explanations for why abused women ‘stay’; conceptualising ‘leaving’ as a process; the process of change; external constraints to leaving; the post-separation period; women who decide to stay; and the breaking-up process: stories of resistance.

### ***J.1. Explanations for why abused women ‘stay’***

In a review of the literature providing reasons for why abused women ‘stay’ in abusive relationships, Dunn (2005) examines the emergence of images of ‘battered’ women as

“survivors” in early and contemporary activists’ discourses. Most of the early representations of abused women she analyses emphasise their emotionality and their victimisation, while the more recent constructions of this collective identity emphasise their rationality and their agency. Both “victim” and “survivor” typifications provide vocabularies of motive for why abused women stay in violent relationships (Dunn, 2005).

Dunn’s review (2005) of scholarly work cited by Loseke (1992), Okun (1986), Davies et al. (1998), and Peled and colleagues (2000) confirms the continuing pervasiveness of this theme. Peled and colleagues (2000) identified three main themes in the literature that serve as explanatory accounts for women staying in violent relationships: those that focus on the increased danger women face on separation and how fear of escalating violence entraps them; those that focus on psychological and situational factors; and those that are more sociological and structural. In contrast, a different set of explanations conceptualises women’s staying as both a process and a choice (Peled et al., 2000; Campbell, Miller, Cardwell, & Belknap, 1994), and is oriented toward the “continuing, active efforts battered women make to understand their situation and to provide for the safety of themselves and their children” (Davies, Lyon, & Monti-Catania, 1998:73, cited in Dunn 2005). Staying can therefore also be viewed as the choice of a person who is consciously negotiating her reality and actively creating meaning within the constraints of her situational freedom (Eisikovits et al., 1998). Similarly, Campbell and colleagues (1994) distinguish between a “pathological orientation”, for example the theories of “learned helplessness” (Walker, 1979) and “traumatic bonding” (Dutton, 1995a), and more recent studies that frame women’s responses to abuse as ‘survival strategies’ rather than ‘symptoms’.

There were several articles in my literature search that highlighted factors contextualising women’s decision-making with regards to leaving or staying in abusive relationships. For instance, in one focus group study, Black and White American women described the decision to stay or leave the violent relationship as a highly rational choice that carefully and accurately took into account the pros and cons of the situation (Short et al., 2000). Responses to why women stay in violent relationships clustered into the following two broad categories: positive and hopeful reasons (including, love for their partners, commitment to their wedding vows, desire to provide a two-parent home, and hope that their partners could and would change), and negative

reasons (including, a lack of financial resources, housing or child care; emotional dependence from threats; and feeling trapped, ashamed or hopeless) (Short et al., 2000). In interviews with South African Muslim women (Nordien, Alpaslan, & Pretorius, 2003), participants identified similar factors that caused them to remain in their abusive marital relationships, including: patriarchal belief systems; economic dependence; staying for the sake of the children; fear of rejection; protecting his image; and hope for change.

Based on interviews with young women who were victims of chronic intimate partner violence, Few and Rosen (2005) explored how relational and situational vulnerabilities relate to the women's decisions to remain in destructive relationships. The authors developed a 'vulnerability conceptual model' to explain an interplay of risk factors and resiliencies that seem to contextualise women's decisions to stay in abusive relationships.

The authors define 'relational vulnerability' as one's beliefs about self in relationship to others and what is normal within an intimate relationship. 'Situational vulnerability' is defined as the degree to which a woman is experiencing life-circumstance or life-stage stress when she begins her relationship with her abusive boyfriend. Life-circumstance stress is the stress individuals experience as a consequence of transitions or events that seem to destabilise them. Life-stage stress is the stress individuals experience as a result of feeling that they are out of sync with traditional age-related transitions such as marriage or parenthood (Few & Rosen, 2005). Life-stage and life-circumstance stress exacerbated feelings of entrapment for both Black and White women in this study. In addition, most were at a stage in their lives where they wanted a relationship to accentuate their social, educational or professional pursuits (Few & Rosen, 2005).

Belknap (1999) offers another understanding of the decision-making experienced by women who have been abused by intimate partners. Her interviews with 18 women suggest that some women experience the decision to leave an abusive relationship as a moral conflict, and that these conflicts are centred around the conflict between self and other. Relational issues with both the abuser and with others, such as children and family, cause considerable conflict for a woman in the process of deciding whether to leave an abusive relationship. Women in this study described the decision to leave or stay as a conflict between the threat to self if they stayed and a threat to relationships with others if they left. Therefore, what may seem to be a clear choice to others, and

what a woman would choose for herself, may pose a moral conflict as well as risks to important relationships that are critical to her sense of self. Belknap (1999) therefore suggests the possibility that the options and solutions abused women choose (in the context of abuse) are often in that moment, life- and self- preserving, although they may not seem so to others.

### ***J.2. Conceptualising 'leaving' as a process***

Anderson and Saunders (2003) reviewed the quantitative research predicting women's stay/leave decisions, and the qualitative research that conceptualises leaving as a process. Taken as a whole, the stay/leave studies using quantitative methodology have furthered our understanding of the multiple internal and external obstacles women encounter in leaving an abusive relationship. They point to an array of environmental and psychological factors that influence a woman's decision to leave or stay - a marked improvement over earlier work that located the source of the problem almost solely within the personalities of 'battered' women (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

In contrast, qualitative 'process' studies - which tend to be more recent than the stay/leave decision studies - typically conceptualise leaving as a complex process involving many decisions and actions taking place over a period of months or years. Process-of-leaving researchers take issue with the predominant focus on leaving as a single act or decision and they are also more deliberate in their efforts to counter popular stereotypes of abused women as helpless or passive, and to underscore women's agency (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Process studies attempt to capture the complexity of leaving through eliciting women's own personal accounts as they describe the social context within which the process of leaving takes place. This highlights the insights that lead to growth experiences along the way, often before an act of leaving can be observed by the outsider, and brings attention to the courage and determination required in preparing for the final separation. In one study, this has been referred to as 'persisting while wanting to change' (Pilkington, 2000). From this perspective, survival status is attained through active and cumulative efforts as women gradually learn more effective strategies for dealing with the abuse (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Many survivors go through several phases in the process of leaving. They may leave and return multiple times, each time learning new coping skills. These phases may involve cognitive and emotional 'leaving' before the actual physical leaving and separation from the abuser (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). The phases of leaving include a) endurance of and managing the violence while disconnecting from others; b) acknowledging the abuse, reframing it, and counteracting it; and c) breaking free, disengaging, and focusing on one's own needs. Anderson and Saunders (2003) argue that there appears to be a post-separation phase that is not addressed by the majority of these studies. After leaving, the IPV literature describes a phase of 'reclaiming self' during the recovery from an abusive relationship.

During the phase of "endurance" (Moss et al., 1997; Landenburger, 1989, cited in Anderson & Saunders, 2003), or "making do" (Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998, cited in Anderson & Saunders, 2003), women make active efforts to construct a particular meaning to their circumstances that will allow both the continuation of the love that they feel toward their partner and endurance of the pain of the abuse. Process studies show that most women report a shift in their perspective that sometimes occurs suddenly, for example, reaching a "breaking point" (Short et al., 2000); but more often this shift develops gradually as women experience fleeting insights about themselves and the relationship that lead to a "turning point" (Enander & Holmberg, 2008; Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Patzel, 2001; Short et al., 2000; e.g., Eisikovits et al., 1998; Campbell et al., 1998; Mills, 1985). In this period of assessment (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002), reframing (Patzel, 2001; Moss et al., 1997), acknowledgement/contemplation (Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2001; Brown, 1997), re-evaluation (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Short et al., 2000), counteracting the abuse (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995) or understanding (Enander & Holmberg, 2008), women begin to redefine the relationship as abusive and label themselves as victims (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002). The assessment period could vary in length from one day to several months (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002). Offering a different perspective, Enander and Holmberg (2008) suggest that women - redefine their relationships as abusive, and - describe an increased awareness of themselves as victims only after having left the abuser. These authors propose that women do not leave because they realised they are abused, but rather, that women realise they were abused because they have left.

As part of coping with violence, many women systematically screen out information that might present their partners in a negative way, thereby maintaining the 'we-ness'. However, at the turning point, women redefine their partners' characteristics as predominantly negative, focus on those characteristics, and treat them as governing factors. By doing so, they prepare themselves and others to turn away from their partners (Eisikovits et al., 1998). Similarly, as long as women are able to safeguard their sense of self-worth and interpret their lives in violence as coping and competence, they are likely to stay (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999). However, when the loss of self peaks and women can no longer recognise themselves, the turning point is inevitable (Eisikovits et al., 1998).

Eisikovits and colleagues (1998) make an important point in noting that many women have a sense of security in spite of the violence. This feeling is related to some subjective sense that they can contain the severity, frequency and overall limits of the violence. When this construction of reality is broken by uncontrolled or unexpectedly severe violence or by the escalation of violence, the women lose their sense of security and experience the violence in a qualitatively different manner. Strong violence, an unexpected audience for it, or a change in locus or escalation bring some women to the realisation that the boundaries they constructed around the violence are trespassed. Once they realise that there are no boundaries to the violence, they perceive the violence as more dangerous and thus more unacceptable (Eisikovits et al., 1998).

In addition to an increase in the severity or frequency of the violence, other factors that can contribute to a shift in thinking include: fewer periods of love and affection; loss of hope that the relationship will get better; witnessing the effect of the abuse on the children; or external influences such as friends, family, and helping professionals who offer support and alternative perspectives (Short et al., 2000; e.g., Eisikovits et al., 1998; Kirkwood, 1993; Ulrich, 1991, cited in Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983).

With the re-evaluation of the relationship women come to recognise the negative impact of the violence on their well-being. This brings difficult emotions of loss, failure, anger, and/or fear to surface. However, these emotions encourage women to begin searching for a way out of the relationship (Eisikovits et al., 1998; Kirkwood, 1993, cited in Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Hoff, 1990). In the breaking free stage (Merritt-Gray &

Wuest, 1995), women prioritise their own needs, and begin to engage in activities they believe will help them leave the relationship, such as finding a safe place to think, finding social support, setting some limits in the relationship, and making small decisions that help increase self-efficacy and self-worth (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). Thus, women begin leaving in many ways that are not always visible to the causal observer, such as arriving home later than usual, withdrawing from their partners emotionally, separating their belongings from the abuser's, and seeking temporary separations (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Landenburger, 1989, cited in Anderson & Saunders, 2003). It is argued that these temporary separations are not a sign of weakness; rather, they seem to give many women enough autonomy and self-confidence to make the final break, although sometimes not before a "last straw" episode of abuse occurs (Angless, Maconachie, & Van Zyl, 1998; Rosen & Stith, 1997, cited in Anderson, 2003). After having left their abusive relationships, an emotional process of 'breaking free' has been described that involves release from strong emotional bonds to the abusive male partners (Enander & Holmberg, 2008). In its widest sense – leaving - can be seen as a disentanglement from this bond.

The literature on IPV supports the notion that women experience changes in their sense of self during an abusive relationship and that a central process of 'reclaiming self' (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001) and forming a new identity (Davis & Taylor, 2006) occurs during the recovery from an abusive relationship. Farrell (1996a) reports that a sense of relationship is central to the healing process for an abused woman. The women in Pilkington's study (2000) described a daily engaging-distancing within themselves and with others to escape unhappiness, experience hope and comfort, and make plans for leaving. Similarly, Belknap (2002) explored how women in abusive relationships described themselves, specifically explicating voices of relational connection and disconnection within the narratives. At one end of the continuum, women voiced extreme disconnection and separation, and found self-description painful and difficult; on the other end women used the voice of self-knowledge and connection with self and others. The stories told by Australian women in Davis and Taylor's study (2006) revealed an inner and outer journey; a journey with self was also a journey with others. The inner processes necessary to move on and away from violence and towards healing involved: naming the process; rejecting the myths; rejecting negative emotions; changing feelings to 'move on'; reclaiming self and forming a new identity; living with

ambivalence; rejecting the cycle of transgenerational violence; and mapping out the journey. The outer journey of journeying with others involved the development of a sense of agency that was characterised by the implementation of strategies that utilised various levels of informal and formal support. Furthermore, the feminist research design in this study, which was aimed at giving centrality to women's experiences, subjectivity and authenticity, also facilitated processes of healing and transformation for the participants (Davis & Taylor, 2006).

According to Anderson and Saunders (2003), these qualitative process studies underscore the agency of abused women by highlighting the courage, determination and persistence involved in leaving an abusive partner. This approach rejects the stereotype of the woman as a passive victim, and replaces it with a more complex psychology of woman-as-survivor, in which abused women slowly regain control over their own lives.

### ***J.3. The process of change***

Increasingly popular among process studies is the application of Prochaska and DiClemente's (1994; 1982) Transtheoretical Model of Change to abused women's leaving (Burke, Denison, Gielen, McDonnell, & O'Campo, 2004; Burke et al., 2001; Brown, 1997). The model assesses a woman's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural readiness to make a needed change to her life, such as terminating the relationship. According to these studies, leaving begins with changes at the emotional and cognitive levels well before an actual physical departure (behavioural changes).

The transtheoretical model of change (TTM) focuses on the process and stages by which individuals' intent to change and their change behaviour are related to their views of how important the need for change is, their evaluation of their own ability to change, and their view of the benefits for change (Cluss et al., 2006). Several published reports have employed the TTM or stages of change model to describe IPV victims' process of change: from precontemplation, or the view that the perpetrator's behaviour is either not a problem or is unlikely to change; to contemplation, during which the pros and cons of the relationship and of taking steps to change it are considered, through preparation, action, maintenance and terminations stages (Zink, Elder, Jacobson, & Klosterman, 2004; Anderson, 2003; Haggerty & Goodman, 2003; Frasier, Slatt, Kowlowitz, & Glowa, 2001; Brown, 1997).



The TTM and stages of change perspective helps explain why traditional advice to “just leave him” typically is not effective in encouraging the majority of victims to make changes, because women in stages of readiness other than preparation or action would be unlikely to see this advice as congruent with their point of view or present needs (Cluss et al., 2006). Furthermore, advocates and health care professionals in the field of IPV are eager to embrace a framework that will help them to understand why women might continue to engage in relationships that are unhealthy. There is also a strong impetus to find a framework to inform the development of effective interventions (Cluss et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, concerns have been raised about the usefulness of TTM-based models and related stage-based interventions that attempt to simplify a complex behaviour to fit a stage-based intervention model (Adams & White, 2005). Furthermore, although the use of the TTM model continues to inform the development of intervention strategies in IPV, it is argued that there is a lack of strong empirical data to support the fit of the model for IPV (Cluss et al., 2006).

Cluss and colleagues (2006) conducted a qualitative study with 20 women self-identified as IPV victims, in order to characterise potential models of change for IPV. The authors aimed to explicate the process of safety-seeking behaviour change for these female victims of IPV, and to explore the fit of the TTM for explaining this process.

The women in this study: moved through stages of readiness generally in a non-linear fashion, with varying rates of progression between safe and non-safe situations; were able to identify a “turning point” in their situations; attempted multiple “action” steps; and were influenced by internal and external factors (Chang et al., 2006). A method of “change mapping” provided illustration of the variety of paths women took as they moved towards increased safety and highlighted the idea that movement toward increased safety is a non-sequential process characterised for most women by ups and downs in motivation and ability to move towards safer alternatives (Chang et al., 2006).

The authors of the above study found that codes based on the TTM were not adequate in fully capturing the experiences of their participants. Neither the model’s focus on a single target behaviour, nor the assumption that the behaviour of an individual moving toward change can be described in discrete stages, applied convincingly to their

respondents' descriptions of change (Cluss et al., 2006). Firstly, the women described many behaviours other than leaving the perpetrator as positive actions they took to decrease their exposure to his abuse; most often these behaviours did not occur as part of an intent to leave. Nevertheless, each of the actions that women took constituted positive health behaviour change and increased their sense of personal safety. Secondly, women described moving ahead with one relevant action while resisting change in another area at the same time, thus making it difficult to place them in a single TTM-based stage at a given moment. Thus, women's responses to abuse experiences are so varied and complex that it is difficult to pinpoint one particular action that constitutes the optimal target behaviour for focused intervention (Cluss et al., 2006).

Based on the inadequacies of the TTM-based model and the results of a grounded theory analytic approach, the authors propose the psychosocial readiness model to describe the process of change for female victims of IPV (Cluss et al., 2006). This model considers readiness as a continuum that ranges from robustly defending the status quo on one end, to being ready to take action towards change on the other. It allows for a complex understanding of the processes that enhance and inhibit positive change for victims. Movement toward and away from change along the continuum results from a dynamic interplay of both internal factors (awareness, perceived support and self-efficacy or perceived power) and external interpersonal and situational factors. This model offers "an empowering approach and provides validation for the many forms of active change that women make, even when they choose to remain with the abuser" (Cluss et al., 2006:270). The model supports findings of other researchers who have noted the role of external factors in influencing victims' internal process of change (Zink et al., 2004; Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Anderson, 2003; Haggerty & Goodman, 2003; Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod, & Ng, 2003; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999; Brown, 1997).

#### ***J.4. External constraints to leaving***

Many process studies, including the newer ones employing the Transtheoretical Model of Change (discussed above), suggest that leaving an abusive relationship is primarily contingent on changes in the subjective meaning of the situation to the women (Burke et al., 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; e.g., Brown, 1997; Ulrich, 1991, cited in Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Landenburger, 1989). There is a concern that these studies come close to the psychological reductionism for which early theories of female masochism and

learned helplessness have been rejected. It is argued that internal explanations for women's decisions also need to be considered in the context of significant structural constraints faced by abused women, as many of the quantitative stay/leave studies have effectively demonstrated (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

In line with the above arguments, some researchers consider the utility of an ecological perspective in understanding abused women's decision-making (Leal & Brackley, 2004; Riger, Raja, & Camacho, 2002; Rothery, Tutty, & Weaver, 1999) and their experiences and perceptions of abuse (Amoakohene, 2004; Ellsberg et al., 2000). This framework supports an ecological understanding of the tough choices women face - it respects the role of environmental factors (demands and resources) in helping or constraining choices at the same time as it recognises the importance of powerful mediating factors (beliefs, values, and a sense of personal efficacy). An ecological model of gender-based violence considers how the meaning of violence is constructed through the interaction of events and circumstances operating at different levels: - events and feelings occurring within the context of the relationship itself (i.e. the characteristics of the abuse); - interactions with others; and - information providing insights regarding cultural norms and attitudes (Ellsberg et al., 2000).

Rothery and colleagues (1999) suggest that an ecological framework can be used as a tool for analysis to help one understand the pressures and opportunities that abused women face as they wrestle with critical decisions. For instance, using an ecological approach, Riger and colleagues (2002) highlighted the radiating impact of abuse on a woman's support system, where the intimate partner violence also had serious ramifications and harmful consequences for a woman's extended family. However, although an ecological analysis enjoys more breadth than a more reductionistic focus on psychological variables to the exclusion of social realities, it does not deny the need for broader critical social analyses. For instance, there are feminist concerns about the need for analyses that address power imbalances - not an inherent aspect of ecological thinking (Rothery et al., 1999).

Certainly, ethnographic interviews conducted with women in South Africa found that interviewees cited patriarchy, women's rights and position in the society, economic deprivation, apartheid and unemployment as major reasons for abuse of women in society. The same women cited, as the most frequent reasons of violence against women by men, 'alcohol and drug abuse', 'socialisation of women into subservient roles',

'jealousy', 'men feeling threatened' and 'men treating women as property' (Dangor, Hoff, & Scott, 1998). Qualitative research with women in Greece (Chatzifotiou, Dobash, & Tsougas, 2001), Mauritius (Bhowon & Munbauhal, 2005), India (Panchanadeswaran, 2005), Ghana (Amoakohene, 2004), Indian women living in the United States (Dasgupta & Warriar, 1996) and Pakistani women (Rabbani, Qureshi, & Rizvi, 2008), have identified similar structural factors contributing to violence. This research has revealed that some of the principal causes of violence are unequal power relations, isolation, poverty and dependence on partner (Bhowon et al., 2005). Other primary reasons women gave for their husbands' violence was alcohol (Bhowon et al., 2005; Panchanadeswaran, 2005), the lack of or insufficient dowry (Panchanadeswaran, 2005) and the misinterpretation of religious beliefs (Rabbani et al., 2008). The above studies argue that the phenomenon of violence against women should be placed in the patriarchal and patrilineal cultural context of many of these countries (Panchanadeswaran, 2005; Heise et al., 1999). Patriarchal societies reinforce the traditional roles of women, fostering discrimination against women in the home, workplace and in important decision-making structures like politics (Bhowon et al., 2005).

In line with the above arguments, Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) points out that researchers who have conducted studies in North America exploring the process of leaving abusive relationships primarily have focused on individual internal processes of change, whereas studies of partner violence conducted in the Middle East have emphasised the significance of society and culture on a woman's decision to leave. Although both sets of studies point to the complexity of the phenomenon, the latter set exemplifies the importance of cultural factors. In examining American Muslim women's experiences of leaving abusive partners, Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) found that participants' experiences of leaving abusive partners were family and community focused. While in the process and in the aftermath of divorce, the women in this study faced significant family and/or community disapproval, and found that they no longer fit into the social structure of their communities. Once places of belonging, many participants' Muslim communities became a source of fear and rejection, causing them to re-examine and reformulate the meaning of religion and community in their lives. Over time, many participants became alienated from their communities, creating a tremendous sense of loss and precipitating spiritual crisis. Distanced to some degree from the power of group-oriented norms, women gradually became free thinkers, reinterpreting their

religion in empowering ways that lead to reclaiming the self (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). This study suggests that the difference between Muslim women and non-Muslim North American women appear not to lie in the dynamic of power and control itself, but rather in the weapons abusers have at their disposal to coerce victims. In a group-oriented culture, the disapproval of family, friends, and peers is an extremely powerful weapon that abusers can effectively wield against victims (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001).

A study with Canadian women who left abusive relationships supports the balance that exists between internal and external resources, which influence a woman's decision in leaving, and remaining out of an abusive relationship (Horrill & Berman, 2004). The women's stories reveal the complex nature of the relationships that exist between interpersonal relationships, sociostructural influences and self. Of importance to the women in the study as they strove to remain out of abusive relationships, was the delicate balance they found between the rediscovery of self and the outside support of family, friends, and professional help agencies.

#### ***J.5. The post-separation period***

Research on the process of leaving an abusive male partner has focused on surviving abuse and the crisis of leaving. Thus, less is known about the experience of women who have left abusive partners and not gone back (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001). However, the challenges maintaining a life independent from the abuser would seem to constitute an equally important part of the process (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999). For instance, Lutenbacher and colleagues (2003) have found that after leaving, women often remained in a continuous state of hypervigilant hiding. Some batterers actively sought and harassed their ex-partners at work, the homes of friends and families, and shelters, making it impossible for some women to remain in their own communities.

The post-separation period was highlighted in a feminist grounded theory study that explored the process of leaving abusive relationships with 15 Canadian women (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001). For the women in this study, the process of leaving and reclaiming self eventually included moving the experience of abuse and survival away from a position of primacy in their lives, not only intra-psychically but also interpersonally and socially.

During a process of ‘figuring it out’, the women consciously and proactively explored and expanded on the reasons for why the abuse happened and why they remained in the relationship as long as they did (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001). In this moving on stage most of the women stopped believing they could have altered the relationship by being a “better” partner; they eventually came to an understanding that there was no clear reason for the abuse, and that they could live with not knowing why the abuse happened. By ‘putting it in its rightful place’, the women no longer allowed the abuse experience to define their existence. Despite the fact that the abuse was not forgotten, it did become displaced as the centre of the woman’s existence, and was put in the context of other life events and new challenges. By putting abuse in its rightful place, the women were able to reinvest in their futures (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001).

All the women found it important to give themselves time and to trust their intuitive feelings with regards the launching of new relationships. The women spoke about their ambivalence, vigilance and constant surveillance in new relationships (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001). This exhaustive vigilance included setting criteria for themselves, their partner, and the relationship. Women defined what they would accept in a relationship, particularly around issues of trust, problem-solving, fighting, and amount of personal investment. The women began to relax their criteria over time.

During the moving on stage, ‘taking on a new image’ was the process of leaving behind the image of abused woman or survivor and taking pride in the person she had become. When the women in this study were being abused, they relinquished parts of themselves, and took on aspects of the abuser’s image. Although in the process of counteracting abuse they strengthened themselves in ways that eventually allowed them to break free and not go back - they lacked time, freedom and energy to forge a new image (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001).

It is important to note, that in order to qualify for the help offered by various agencies, women were forced to repeatedly demonstrate how they met the criteria of the “abused woman”. This public framing and categorisation of the woman as victim or survivor limited their options. In moving on, women began to consider and take stock of themselves in new and different ways. They were more aware of their own personal power and control, they felt better able to care for themselves, and were more secure in who they were (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001). Similarly, in interviews with 10

Canadian women who had left abusive relationships, participants spoke about re-establishing fractured relationships once they felt they had greater control over their situations and could resume interpersonal relationships with some vigour (Horrill & Berman, 2004).

In describing women who have been abused, the terminology in domestic violence literature has shifted from victim to survivor. The term survivor is often used to emphasise women's strengths, resilience and capacities. Wuest and Merritt-Gray's (2001) analysis of the process of moving on shows that the label 'survivor' still gives primacy to abuse in women's lives, even though women in this stage are taking on a new image and no longer see abuse or the survival experience as the centre of their existence. Hence, the authors make the point that although 'survivor' may be an empowering term for some women, it also has the potential to disempower women who are in the process of redefining themselves and orienting themselves towards the future (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001).

Similarly, based on interviews with Swedish women who have left their abusers, Hydén (1999) argues that in order for clinicians to more effectively work with abused women, it is necessary to develop strategies aimed at assisting women to avoid adopting the identity of a 'battered woman'. Although the all-consuming nature of living in an abusive relationship can threaten to become the woman's whole identity, a woman who has been abused by her partner *is* not 'a battered woman'. Rather, she has 'experienced' living with a partner who is abusive; in this reading violence is not considered to be the defining factor in her life. Hydén (1999) reminds us that when the woman "met the man who would later abuse her, she was on her way somewhere, and came from somewhere. She needs help in recalling this, and in finding herself again" (p.467). From this perspective, the identity of a 'battered woman' offers too limited a base on which to build a self-understanding, and understanding oneself as a 'survivor' (an understanding that emanates from the man and his violent behaviour), has the same effect. Hydén (1999) suggests that what the woman needs help in doing is to define herself as the 'woman of experience' she really is:

"To be able to define her in that direction, her story of what she has experienced must contain more than an account of male dominance and female subordination. This does not mean that her pain and difficulties should be belittled. It means that in addition to each story of male violent behaviour there is a parallel story of female opposition. It means that the history of pain and

forced subordination in her life is accompanied by the history of resistance. These two stories constitute parts of the abused woman's history- and both need to be acknowledged" (p.467).

### ***J.6. Women who decide to stay***

The objective of most process studies has been to demonstrate the ways in which women still technically 'in' the relationship progressively undergo significant growth experiences that are part of the leaving process. However, according to Anderson and Saunders (2003) this particular framework might create the assumption that the only way a woman can regain her agency is to leave and that staying is always unhealthy. In their study, Eisikovits and colleagues (1998) partially counter this assumption by analysing the inner process leading up to the turning point in a group of women who were abused and stayed with their partners but took active steps to stop the violence. These authors argue that abused women can experience empowerment by defining a turning point within the relationship in addition to, or instead of, leaving it; they thus adopt a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" approach to make sense of staying in the relationship and stopping the violence (Eisikovits et al., 1998). Here, the term 'turning point' is used to refer to the women's decision to refuse to accept the violence but to continue to live with the perpetrators. However, it is emphasised that staying does not necessarily mean that the women are resigned to violence. This study cautions practitioners and researchers not to view the leaving of violent partners as an exclusive sign of an abused woman's development of strengths and coping ability (Eisikovits et al., 1998).

Other authors have also rejected the reductionist view that assumes that separation from the partner is the ultimate, or only, act of resistance. They have shown that women who have been abused expend much energy trying to stop, reduce or manage the abuse, and that they employ 'strategies of resistance' to counter men's attempts to control them (Cavanagh, 2003; Lempert, 1996b; Tift, 1993; Dobash et al., 1992; Mills, 1985). For instance, it has been shown that an important way in which women actively cope with and manage abuse in their relationships is by "predicting unpredictability" (Langford, 1996). This theory emphasises the simultaneous, circular and ongoing nature of abused women's perceptions and monitoring of danger in interactions with abusive partners, in order to reduce the risk of harm to themselves and other family members (Langford, 1998). Women thus develop sophisticated knowledge about and response patterns to their partners' violent behaviours, and respond with strategies of avoidance,



engagement, fleeing, and enlisting the help of others to avert or delay violent incidents (Langford, 1996).

Incorporating a similar theoretical perspective which forefronts the complexity of intimate relationships, and which sees women as active rather than passive agents, Cavanagh (2003) considers what women actively 'do' when attempting to make their relationships safe for themselves and their children. Her interviews with 136 women revealed that women's responses to violence were both dynamic and complex, and that women took steps to reduce or eliminate it. Furthermore, the women applied energy and skills to 'managing' the violence, which implies more than simply 'coping' with or 'accepting' it.

Similarly, Downs and colleagues (2007) collected qualitative data from 447 women, and found that women developed numerous strategies aimed at protecting themselves from IPV. Non-physical means of self-protection included running away from her partner, locking herself in another room, calling or threatening to call others for help, talking to her partner with the intent of motivating him to stop the violence, and compliance with what she perceived to be her partner's wishes (Downs, Rindels, & Atkinson, 2007). In some incidents, women described fighting back (slapping, hitting, kicking or threatening to hit her partner). Male partners usually responded to women's use of violence with even greater violence, thus most women preferred using non-violent strategies.

The above studies and theories give visibility to women's unseen actions within abusive relationships, and highlight their strength in actively manipulating and interacting within the severe constraints of chaotic and dangerous environments (Cavanagh, 2003; Langford, 1998; Langford, 1996).

### ***J.7. The breaking-up process: stories of resistance***

Based on interviews with 10 Swedish 'battered' women at the time of leaving their abusers, and two years on, Hydén (2005; 1999) examines the relationships between male violence and female resistance. Her readings of the narratives of women who leave their abusers contributes knowledge about the different ways that a battered woman can express her resistance to violence, and how she fractures the man's sphere of power (Hydén, 1999). In several analytical readings of her data, Hydén (2007; 2005; 1999)

attends to women's experiences and language of fear, and considers fear as evidence of women's resistance to IPV. She also analyses the relationships between power, responsibility and activity in the various ways that abused women position themselves in their narratives of leaving.

The ten women (ranging in age from 21 to 45 years) were interviewed on six separate occasions over a two-year period. To encourage free narratives from her participants, Hydén (1999) adopted an open interview style with few questions formulated in detail. Her form of interviewing is built on the assumption that "the research interview can be understood as a relational practice that places at the informant's disposal a framework for developing his/her understanding" (p.452). Thus, the interview questions are aimed primarily at constructing a framework and a relationship within which the participant can have the opportunity to freely discuss her thoughts and feelings. With this approach, the participant's associations, inner logic and own understanding (or lack thereof) of what had happened can be accessed. According to Hydén (1999), such an interview form gives the researcher the opportunity to gain richer material than the traditional 'in-depth' interview.

Hydén (2007) furthermore notes that women's break-up narratives are not always organised in a linear fashion, and thus defy easy categorisation and analysis. Break-up stories are often circular, denoting a discontinuity in space and time. Research interviewers should therefore offer a discursive space that accepts the use of different temporal frameworks that do not discipline women into traditional linear lines (e.g. beginning, middle and end).

### ***J.7.1. The break-up process and women's experiences of fear***

Hydén (1999) analysed the theme of fear that constituted a major part of the break-up process for the women who left their abusers. Fear seemed to be an unavoidable part of the break-up, and was identified as a complex emotion that changed character with time. Hydén (1999) identified two basic kinds of fear: undifferentiated and differentiated. In the weeks and months after the break-up, undifferentiated fear completely overwhelmed the women as a general feeling, and they saw no opportunity to influence - or deal with - it. Five to ten months after the break-up the women began to speak about differentiated fear. This fear was connected to the husband and was not completely overwhelming. The women also described an increasing capacity for action and reduced consequences

for their lives in general. After two years, the fear had become a background emotion. The incapacity to act had disappeared, and the women felt they had the opportunity to make themselves feel safer.

These results support the notion that breaking-up or leaving an abusive relationship involves an extended process, and which involves risks to the woman. The most obvious risk is that a woman cannot control the consequences that her resistance and the break-up might bring about. This lack of the opportunity to influence and control constitutes one of the basic reasons for the woman's fear during the entire leaving process (Hydén, 1999).

### ***J.7.2. Fear as evidence of resistance***

From a feminist stance, women are unambiguously victims when it comes to intimate partner violence. However, Hydén (2005) cautions that 'victims' or 'survivors' of 'battering' are often reduced to their suffering. She argues that battered women's ways of opposing and resisting violence are still underemphasised and insufficiently examined in feminist discourses of violence in intimate relationships.

Hydén (1999) examined her interview material for how, when and where the resistance of battered women was expressed in their descriptions of the break-up process. She considers whether the women's resistance against the violence is so ubiquitous that it is difficult to identify. For instance, abused women who are still in the process of physically leaving their partners, possibly express their resistance in a 'hidden transcript' (Scott, 1990, cited in Hydén, 1999) where their resistance and actions are hardly noticed by others. Only once they physically leave their partner, is this resistance expressed openly and publicly. Furthermore, it could be that the dominant cultural discourses of resistance are based on such preconceptions about what characterises resistance, that they allow no space for everyday resistance as it has to be exerted by a person living in a violent intimate relationship (Hydén, 2005). For instance, one common way of defining resistance involves a dichotomous stance, whereby all actions that do not explicitly contain resistance – such as hesitancy, uncertainty or ambivalence – are categorised as non-resistance (Hydén, 2005).

Hydén (1999) argues that women's narratives of fear can be read as narratives that say something about women's desire and ability to resist. This reading is not completely

self-evident, since we usually associate resistance with action. However, fear can be seen as an expression of resistance on the part of women, not in that it includes action, but rather in that it constitutes a force which makes the woman notice that what may happen is something she doesn't want to see happen (Hydén, 2005). Thus, fear contains an unarticulated knowledge of what is desired and not desired. The fact that the woman is frightened means that she is opposed to the violence. This reading sees fear, helplessness and resistance as closely associated with each other, where fear is the resistance offered by those who are presumed to be powerless; and a frightened abused woman in contact with her inner resistance is not so easy to dominate (Hydén, 1999). The awareness of this two-fold characteristic of fear, suffering/resistance, can work to empower the abused woman, while the monolithic concept of fear possibly works to disempower (Hydén, 2005).

### ***J.7.3. Finding a language for fear***

Hydén (1999) highlights the importance of helping women to communicate their fear. "If the women receives help in articulating her fear, and is not influenced only by her own powerlessness but can also confront her will to resist, then it is possible for her to move on and act in accordance with this- that is, to offer more active resistance" (p.462). However, it is not necessarily easy for an abused woman to find a listener/respondent with whom she can formulate her experiences. Her fear is unique in many ways and can therefore be difficult to explain to others who do not know her kind of fear.

As Hydén (1999) explains, the experience of fear as a shared human experience is most often related to temporary, acute fear that is associated with a time-limited event. The experience of long-lasting, chronic, fear is not shared by most people. People who are chronically afraid may find it hard to communicate their reality and their feelings to others, and thus may become more and more isolated. This partly explains why an abused woman often seeks verification of her experience from her abusive partner (the only person who is constantly present with the woman during her abusive situation).

For the women interviewed in this study, undifferentiated fear was often expressed in the language of images (portraying muteness and paralysis) as opposed to the language of words. Therefore, Hydén (1999) urges that listeners and respondents must interpret this as a communication, and must actively ask about a woman's experience of fear; "it

is important to meet her both in her feelings of solitude and resignation and in her capacity for action” (p.467).

#### ***J.7.4. Agency and positioning***

In a subsequent analysis of her interviews with the 10 Swedish women who left their abusers, Hydén (2005) examined the relationships between power, responsibility and activity as reflected in the various ways battered women positioned themselves in their narratives of leaving. Here the author leaves the domain of thematic analysis and focuses her attention on the discursive strategies and positions adopted by women in their narratives about leaving abusive relationships. The focus is on narrative as a means for the creation of an individual self and of the performative aspects of this process. Hydén’s (2005) analytic strategy attended to the various plots, the different storylines that held the stories together, and the subject positions from which they were told.

The analysis identified three different storylines, accompanied by different subject positions. These basic positions cast the abused woman as: Wounded, Self-blaming, or Bridge-building (Hydén, 2005). These positions were associated with relational themes such as vulnerability, isolation and connectedness, respectively.

When the woman was in the position of the Wounded, the man was still the powerful acting agent, issuing orders and demanding obedience. The Self-blaming woman presented a series of activities of resistance, and accused herself of not having acted accordingly in the past. The Bridge-building woman reached out to herself and in a more forgiving way acknowledged her past inability to support herself (Hydén, 2005).

Almost every women spoke from the position of the Wounded during the interviews conducted soon after they arrived at the shelter. The majority of the women abandoned this position after some time. Almost every women spoke from the Self-blaming position on one or several occasions during the two-year period. Only a few women spoke from the Bridge-building position, the position that offered them a possibility of reconciling differences between their lives then and now (Hydén, 2005).

All of the above positions hold potentials and limitations for a woman trying to form a new life after an abusive relationship. In the short-term, the position of the Wounded sets the woman free from guilt and responsibility and brings her sympathy and support

from others. In the long run, however, this position can be the most limiting of the three, since the vulnerability associated with this position as victim makes her exclude accounts of her own strength and resistance (Hydén, 2005).

In the Self-blaming position the woman excludes accounts of weakness and failure and isolates herself from possibilities of support. In this position, a woman is fully confronted with her own harsh criticism. The Self-blaming woman idealises her strong and active self, and refuses to acknowledge and respect her vulnerable and victimised self (Hydén, 2005).

The Bridge-building position seems to be the most favourable one in that it embraces reconciliation and connectedness (Hydén, 2005). The Bridge-building woman is indulgent with the powerless victim in herself, and the break-up has meant that she has encountered the woman in her that is able to act. Rather than place these two women in opposition to each other, she lets them co-exist.

With this research, Hydén (2005) constructs the concept of a 'battered woman' from the vantage point of diversity rather than uniformity. From this perspective, the subject of an abused woman is understood as existing in a set of multiple and contradictory positions or subjectivities.

## **K. Representations of intimate partner violence**

As suggested above by Hydén (2005), the subject of IPV can be represented in different ways and from various positions. This theme attends to this issue by looking at how understandings of IPV have developed over time, and how 'formula stories' and institutional discourses have the power to constrain the ways in which individuals make sense of, define and represent their lived experience of IPV.

### ***K.1. Conceptualisations of IPV***

Prior to the early 1970's, domestic violence or IPV was generally understood as domestic 'disharmony', 'family maladjustment' or domestic 'disturbance' (Pleck, 1987; Schechter, 1982, cited in Leisenring, 2006), and both professional and popular understandings of IPV often portrayed 'battered' women as culpable for the violence they experienced. Rooted in the second-wave of the feminist movement, the battered

woman's movement originating in the early 1970's recognised IPV as a serious social and public health problem. This political movement raised consciousness about physical and sexual abuse, and effectively moved IPV out of the private and individual domestic domain. This resulted in a new definition of IPV that depicted victims of abuse as innocent and not responsible for the violence they experienced, thus constructing a more sympathetic public image of the "battered woman" (Leisenring, 2006; Dunn, 2005; Loseke, 1992) as a "pure victim" (Davies et al., 1998, cited in Leisenring, 2006). Women's right movements sought to create powerful images of 'battered women' to inspire people to take action and create social change (Dunn, 2005). The pure victim model depicts battered women as trapped by the ongoing severity and frequency of violence, and assumes that victims are extremely traumatised and greatly suffer after the abuse has taken place. Lamb (1999) maintains that advocacy groups created this image of victims in an attempt to garner public sympathy and counter previous discourses that blamed the victim. According to Dunn (2005), claims-makers constructing battered women as victims have sought more to absolve them than to explore their "role" in the abuse, and positioned themselves explicitly in opposition to such "victim blaming" approaches.

Some researchers conceptualise victimisation within an interactionist framework highlighting the social processes through which a person is conferred victim status and categorised as such (Leisenring, 2006; Holstein & Miller, 1997). Claims of victimisation are understood to occur within an organisational, cultural and historical context which in turn is shaped by multiple perspectives about what constitutes a 'true victim' (Dunn, 2001). Thus the assigning or claiming of a victim identity is seen to be strongly tied both to existing public constructions of victims and to how individuals derive meaning from these constructions (Leisenring, 2006).

### ***K.2. Formula stories***

Loseke (2001) argues that part of establishing the social problem of "wife abuse" was creating new 'formula stories' (Berger, 1997) that placed the identities of the "battered woman" and the "abusive man" at the centre of depictions of domestic violence. Formula stories are narratives about types of experiences (such as 'wife abuse' or IPV) involving distinctive types of characters (such as the "battered woman" and the "abusive man"). As such, stories become widely acknowledged ways of making sense of -, communicating - and defining - lived experience. Similarly, Gubrium and Holstein

(2001) argue that institutions produce “institutional identities”, i.e. they hold locally salient images, models and templates which then serve as resources for structuring the subjective self.

Loseke (1999) has shown how the story of wife abuse can be an interpretive resource for women, showing them how to understand their experiences in ways that resonate with the typical story of “wife abuse”. However, although the template of formula stories can help one think about difficult experiences, they do not always capture the complexity, ambiguity and indeterminacy of lived experience. Women’s lived realities of intimate partner violence can lead them to tell stories that might seem implausible to others. For instance, the lived experience of violence can include characters that illogically act in both loving and hateful ways (Loseke, 2001). At the level of personal experience women might find it difficult to see themselves as an example of the ‘battered woman’. The complex lived experience of women can be one where love and hate, caring and violence are perceived as coexisting, and where it is difficult to assign unambiguous theoretical meanings to violence, to selves, and to partners (Loseke, 2001).

Given this complexity and ambiguity, women’s talk of their experiences with violence can be difficult to articulate (Lempert, 1996a), and often defy narrative conventions (Riessman, 1990). Stories can approach what Frank (1995) calls a ‘chaos narrative’, a type of narrative that has no sequence or discernible causality, a narrative that is about vulnerability, futility, impotence. Such stories are often heard by others as incoherent and disconnected, and can lead listeners to reject the stories and the storyteller’s reality (Loseke, 2001). Clearly, women look for a narrative that would be more culturally acceptable and identifiable. However, Loseke (2001) argues that some women will reject the formula story of ‘wife abuse’ or intimate partner violence (IPV) as their own story despite what it can offer.

For instance, Loseke (2001) considers the implications for a woman who understands and accepts herself as a character in the story of partner abuse. Embracing this identity of ‘abused woman’ can mean that the woman casts herself as a dependent, passive and confused character in a script controlled by her abusive partner. While dramatising the victim status of the ‘battered’ woman no doubt was necessary on the public stage of social problem construction (Loseke, 1999), such victim status remains disempowering



(Lempert, 1996b). Furthermore, the 'battered woman's' identity is often in danger of being used as a pervasive and master narrative influencing all aspects of the woman's life in the past, present and future. This can become a hindrance to women who prefer to construct new identities not tied to old painful memories and experiences (Loseke, 2001).

In conclusion, Loseke (2001) does not suggest that the partner abuse formula story should be discarded due to failure. Many women do see themselves in this narrative, and find the narrative helpful in thinking about and leaving violent relationships (Riessman, 1990). The narrative of wife abuse is often successful, yet it remains that other women whose stories are potentially tellable as those of wife abuse resist this narrative as a way to understand their lives and their selves. Rather than simply assuming that some form of individual psychopathology underlies these women's resistance, it would seem beneficial to examine the characteristics of the narrative itself as it relates to their particular circumstances.

Loseke (2001) furthermore explores how formula stories shape the experience of women who participate in support groups for those who have experienced intimate partner violence. In a sense, support groups are storytelling groups (Mason-Schrock, 1996), and members often undertake considerable narrative identity work in order to articulate "better" stories, populated with familiar institutional identities. Here Loseke (2001) alerts to the interactional power that facilitators and group members hold in support groups. The interactional technologies of narrative work in these places involve subtle techniques such as asking questions, rephrasing stories, ignoring some aspects of women's stories and dramatising other aspects. Members and facilitators keep storytellers on track, and stories may not be allowed to veer too much from institutionally preferred themes, plots and characters. Women's stories in these groups are therefore interactionally shaped to take on particular meanings of the formula story of wife abuse. These groups can thus be seen to be involved in the collaborative production of narratives and therefore the collaborative production of identities; it is group interaction that "unfolds to produce acceptable stories" (Mason-Schrock, 1996). Although the formula story has been instrumental in encouraging the public to take violence against women seriously, Loseke (2001) cautions against group agendas and dynamics that are about transforming identity so that participants display institutionally preferred personas.

The above point is further underscored by Wilson and Strebel (2004) who illustrated how the discourses of South African psychiatric institutions ‘fail’ abused women and constrain the representation of their experience. Through the examination of the written texts of the psychiatric case documents of 10 female psychiatric patients with a history of physical or sexual abuse, it became evident that there were a variety of linguistic processes through which woman abuse was positioned. For instance, the written texts held explanatory narratives that were based on several implicit judgements and assumptions about woman abuse, e.g. abuse was often explained in the context of internal world and processes, highlighting the woman’s inadequate defence structure as the precursor to her psychological problems. This study alerts to the power that a particular discourse can have in the positioning and representation of the issue of woman abuse. The authors argue that there is a need for clinicians in psychiatric institutions to actively resist the constraining effects of psychiatry’s language, by giving themselves, and their patients, the space to speak the contradictions and ambiguities of experience (Wilson & Strebel, 2004).

The above arguments raise several interesting questions to be considered in my study’s analysis. For instance: as a female clinical psychologist, what are my ‘preferred stories’ with regards to IPV, and how did these influence my research? How have my knowledge-claims of IPV been informed by institutionally preferred identities and discourses? What were the acceptable and identifiable stories of IPV that emerged from the interviews and focus groups?

## **L. Making sense of intimate partner violence**

This theme follows from the above discussion that illustrated how IPV can be represented and defined in different ways and from varying positions. Here, research is discussed that attends to how people with and without personal experiences of IPV make sense of the problem in different ways. This theme also takes a closer look at how individuals are typified by ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ discourses, and the implications of these discourses for self-construction and identity work.

### ***L.1. Constructing the problem of IPV from personal experience***

Drawing on theories on the construction of the self, troubled identities and institutional selves, Berns and Schweingruber (2007) explored how people make sense of intimate

partner violence. They attempt to explain differences in how victims and non-victims construct narratives of IPV. The authors argue that victims of IPV have a harder time making sense of the problem than those with no first-hand or second-hand experience (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007).

The narratives people construct to understand social problems differ from the narratives they construct to understand and interpret their selves (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). If people are trying to understand a social problem such as IPV with which they have personal experience, they are likely to engage in interpretive work that connects their own experiences with the problem and with a possible troubled identity. However, people with no involvement in the social problem do not have the additional identity construction occurring (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007).

There is a broad range of groups that compete to construct social problems and troubled identities. These “discursive environments” include professionals, self-help groups, personal experience, friends and family, policy and media (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). These discursive environments provide individuals with multiple options and opportunities to draw from institutional discourse in the construction of social problems. Despite the range and number of available narratives in today’s post-modern world, Berns and Schweingruber (2007) argue that people do not encounter this range of sources on an equal basis. It is more likely that victims of IPV will be exposed to a greater range of narratives, and thus be challenged by the complexity of trying to integrate a narrative of their identity with a narrative of IPV. In contrast, non-victims are less likely to be overwhelmed by the task of constructing a narrative of IPV, and it is thus more likely that they’ll tend to rely on a more limited range of relationships and sources to understand the problem of IPV (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007).

It has been argued that discourse or “common knowledge” about social problems in the media and popular culture contains more easily categorised experiences, and less confusing frames, for explaining social problems than does lived experience (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007; Loseke, 2001; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Berger, 1997). Therefore, although victims do draw from institutional talk to construct their narratives (Loseke, 2001), it is also common for victims to reject formula stories, cultural scripts or simplified institutional talk used by others to frame their experience (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007; Loseke, 2001; Baker, 1997; Lempert, 1997b).

The process of constructing their narrative of abuse is instrumental in assisting victims to understand their experiences (Lempert, 1997b; Lempert, 1994) or ‘troubled identities’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001), and they must draw from a range of sources that will respect the complexity of their lived experience (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). Troubled identities refer to an interpretive process that people go through in identifying or understanding their selves as part of a social problem (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Based on interviews with 20 people (11 women; 9 men) randomly selected from non-academic staff at an American university, Berns and Schweingruber (2007) explored how people evaluate and use different sources of information in their understandings of intimate partner violence. Their study found that in not having to explain lived experience, non-victims found it easier to use common formula stories to develop clearer and more robust narratives, but not necessarily better narratives. When several sources of experience were used and the social problem was also a part of the self, evaluation of claims were more complex. Thus, the interpretive process in the construction of IPV narratives is easier when the self is not involved.

There were three dominant elements in the narratives of non-victims. Non-victims explained many reasons for why victims stay; they described victims as lacking personal qualities that might otherwise allow them to prevent the abuse; and they focused on the victim significantly more than on the abuser (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). Individuals with no first-hand experience with abuse had a lot of “understanding” about the victims, and their descriptions were more clear-cut, formal and typified than those with first-hand experience (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). This “common knowledge” was garnered from the popular discourse of the battered women’s movement and a majority of media stories focusing primarily on victims (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). Often individuals accepted as “fact” information apparently gained from the media for which they couldn’t remember a specific media source. These individuals typically referred to a “stock victim” that allowed them to reconstruct details about a victim’s experience. These formula stories and “media-created victims” were usually less complicated than the stories that emerged from victims (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007).

In contrast, victims with first-hand experience of abuse used a variety of sources in thinking about IPV; they challenged the cultural scripts about why victims stay in order to illustrate the complexity of their narratives. Sources of information included their

own abuse, stories from friends, their experience with advocates and other professionals, as well as media accounts (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). Some victims did use institutional talk to help construct their troubled self-narrative, even though the added narratives possibly also complicated the problem. Those with first-hand experience of abuse resisted the “simple understandings” for why victims stay, and found it more complicated to construct a narrative that “makes sense” (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007).

This study cautions against IPV being accepted as a “known issue” that is “understood” (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). The possibility that the robustness of non-victims’ understanding of social problems will progressively marginalise the victims’ understanding of the problem raises several concerns for the authors: victims may be forced into accepting simplified narratives in order to access the help they need, and simpler frames for understanding IPV might result in shaping dominant solutions that are rigid and narrow (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007).

### ***L.2. ‘Victim’ and ‘Survivor’ discourses***

The identity of being a “victim” has been problematised for a variety of reasons. These have mostly to do with the lack of agency that appears to define victimisation. In turn, “survivor” typifications have been used to repair this “disability” – restoring moral worth as well as agency to abused women (Dunn, 2005).

Authors who typify women in ways that use emotionality, such as guilt (Walker, 1979), fear and shame (Martin, 1976), emphasise their entrapment, and thereby their essential “victim” identities (Dunn, 2005). These constructions meet the normative requirement that victims cannot be held responsible for their misfortunes (Dunn, 2005; Dunn, 2001; Loseke, 1999), and thereby restore audiences’ empathy and sympathy towards them (Clark, 1997). Dunn (2005) describes how some feminists were quick to note the problematic implications of the vocabularies of motive described above. They argued that constructions of battered women as passive and trapped pathologised them, cast them as deviant, and failed to recognise them as active and striving agents and survivors (Barry, 1979, cited in Dunn, 2005, and Leisenring, 2006).

Accordingly, there appears to be an increasing tendency to characterise abused women as survivors, and to emphasise their agency as well as their victimisation. Some early

theorists have framed 'battered' women's 'deviance' as survival tactics. Battered women's "unusual actions" were seen as a form of "strength" (Walker, 1979), and rather than be considered passive and weak, battered women were recast as "active and doing" (Barry, 1979). This foreshadowed the argument of later activists who complained that early feminist studies failed to acknowledge the resistance strategies women used to struggle against their powerlessness (Madriz, 1997, cited in Dunn, 2005). The "active and positive ways in which women resist, cope, and survive" (Kelly, 1988:163, cited in Dunn, 2005) thus became the focus of attention. Battered women were framed as active, determined and courageous (Jenkins, 1996; Hoff, 1990); brave and heroic (Bowker, 1996; Jenkins, 1996; Okun, 1986); capable and responsible (Hoff, 1990); and, assertive, persistent and logical (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). Ironically, the very phenomenon of enduring violence, previously signifying helplessness, becomes a kind of agency: battered women continue to stay, not because they are immobilised through fear, guilt or love (Dunn, 2005), but they do so as "active participants" (Jenkins, 1996) making "strategic and rational choices" (Dunn, 2005).

However, there are some significant tensions inherent in the reconstruction of victims. "Survivor" typifications confer a kind of self-sufficiency on those so labelled that might dissuade rather than encourage assistance (Dunn, 2005). As already pointed out by Loseke (2001; 1992), battered women who fail to show that they are "true" victims might risk losing access to services offered by the criminal justice system, shelters, and other social service organisations (Dunn, 2001, cited in Leisenring, 2006). Moreover, to cast victims as agents can be interpreted as minimising the effects of the very real structural inequalities faced by abused women (Konradi, 1996). Dunn (2005:23) furthermore cautions that calling battered women "survivors", "while granting them agency, may only shift responsibility and attention back to them as individuals", thus opening up new avenues for "victim accountability" (McDermott & Garofalo, 2004). In essence, when a woman assumes a survivor identity, she possibly risks having her victimisation called into question (Dunn, 2001, cited in Leisenring, 2006).

Similarly, Mahoney (1994, cited in Dunn, 2005) warns that a dichotomous construction of victimisation versus agency can prevent battered women from identifying their experience as victimisation. This problem is exacerbated when the definition of 'victim' is so stigmatising that it is impossible to reconcile with perceiving agency in oneself. This "double bind" (Picart, 2003) is further reinforced by activists and professionals

who privilege a “survivor” identity. This contributes to a therapeutic framing of victimisation in which victims are assumed to need to “move on” from victimhood to survivorhood as part of a healing and empowering process (Dunn, 2005). This is in part due to the undesirable connotations of the term ‘victim’, as someone who is damaged, passive, and powerless (Best, 1997). Certainly, in her research on identity work in intimate stalking cases, Dunn (2001:307, cited in Leisenring, 2006) found that stalking victims and advocates believed that “victims ‘ought’ to transcend their victimization and become *survivors* in the definitional process”.

In brief, it is argued that, “neither the image of the “passive victim” nor the image of the “active survivor” is sufficient to capture the range of victims’ experiences, precisely because they are typifications that reduce, rather than add complexity” (Dunn, 2005:24).

### ***L.3. Victimisation and empowerment - Implications for identity work***

Following from the above, Leisenring (2006) explored how abused women both draw from and reject victim discourses in their processes of self-construction and self-representation. The data revealed how available ‘victim’ discourses were both enabling and constraining for women who had experienced violence from an intimate partner. Women most often claimed a victim identity to convey they had suffered a harm they could not control and to show that they were deserving of sympathy and support. Women most often rejected a victim identity to distance themselves from the notion that they were powerless, weak and culpable for their experiences. However, this was not a clear-cut process: many women drew simultaneously from multiple discourses in their identity work, and their identity claims shifted throughout the interviews (Leisenring, 2006). As Loseke (2001:108) maintains, “The complexity of lived experience has a way of resisting formulaic presentation”.

Many of the women in this study were influenced by what Berns (2004, cited in Leisenring, 2006) deems the “victim empowerment frame”. This way of understanding victimisation is sympathetic to victims yet holds them responsible for solving the problem of violence in their lives; thus women are told that they need to ‘take back the power’ or ‘take charge of their lives’. A focus on victim empowerment thus centres attention on why abused women stay in abusive relationships and what they individually can do to solve their problems of violence (Berns, 2004; Dunn, 2004). Thus “empowerment” becomes solely about what abused women do or not do, and leaves out

the abuser and the social, cultural and structural context (Berns, 2004). Under this framework, if an abused woman fails to “empower” herself, she may be open to blame for any future violence she experiences (Leisenring, 2006). Arguably, perspectives that encourage an individualistic focus on victim empowerment and responsibility without taking into account other social processes ultimately fail abused women (Leisenring, 2006).

When telling their stories, many of the women participants expressed a belief that they were somehow partially responsible for their partner’s violence (Leisenring, 2006). Their responsibility included not standing up to their abusers or leaving the relationship or having a ‘victim frame of mind’. Furthermore, the women commonly believed that changing their behaviour or mind-set would reduce their risk of being harmed again. Leisenring (2006) argues that this expression of responsibility does not mean that the women blamed themselves for the violence, but instead reflects current “victim empowerment” discourses and represents the women’s attempts to imply that they have some measure of control over their lives. Leisenring (2006) concludes that, in their attempts to construct self-identities, abused women become caught between notions of victimisation, agency and responsibility.

The above two themes have illustrated how individuals draw on a variety of available discourses or “discursive resources” (Taylor, 2006; Taylor & Littleton, 2006) in their attempts to make sense of IPV, and to find ways of representing and conceptualising their experience with IPV. Certainly, this is a narrative methodological focus that I will incorporate in the analysis of my study’s data.

### **M. Intimate partner violence in adolescent/young adult relationships**

This theme now veers away from the above discussion, and draws together various strands of research that relate to intimate partner violence and adolescent/young adult relationships. Given that my study involves interviews with young adults, it was important to consider the qualitative research conducted with this age group in particular. This theme addresses the following sub-topics: micro-practices of heterosexuality; conflict and voice in young women’s narratives of IPV; individual and relationship processes in violent relationships; sexual coercion in South African adolescent relationships; and adolescent and youth: their views on dating violence.



### ***M.1. Micro-practices of heterosexuality***

Using a feminist framework, Tolman and colleagues (2003) explored how adolescent girls' and boys' ordinary descriptions of their early romantic heterosexual relationships produce evidence of how violence, and the antecedents to violence, can weave into the fabric of such relationships. The authors identify Rich's (1983) conception of the institution of 'compulsory heterosexuality' as an interpretive framework for analysing youth's relationship narratives. This institution of heterosexuality is comprised of unwritten but clearly codified and compulsory conventions by which males and females join in romantic relationships.

After an initial content analysis of participants' relationship narratives was performed, the authors used the Listening Guide method of narrative analysis (Tolman & Szalacha, 1999) to examine the ways girls and boys were negotiating compulsory heterosexuality. This method involves a series of sequential readings of the same narrative in which the researcher "listens" for one specific perspective each time through. The focus here was on listening specifically for how adolescents represented themselves in the interview, how they experienced their sexuality, and the ways in which they enacted, did not enact, and actively resisted scripts of compulsory heterosexuality (Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, & Porche, 2003).

One of the central tenets of compulsory heterosexuality that pervaded these young teens' descriptions of their romantic relationships was the belief that most boys are, by nature, sexual predators, i.e. "boys will be boys" (Tolman et al., 2003). Sexually exploitative behaviours from boys were accepted as a given hazard in heterosexual romantic relationships. Given this expectation of male sexual aggression, a priority of girls was learning to read and respond to it in ways that would allow them to participate in this new form of social relationship - while at the same time hedging to protect themselves from harm. Girls described the myriad ways in which they armoured themselves against this anticipated sexual aggression, such as breaking up with boys in anticipation of being pressured for sex and setting firm limits. Similarly, the narratives of boys were pervaded with constant and intense peer pressure to behave in sexually aggressive ways, particularly in front of other boys. Thus, the pivotal role of how boys related to girls in their process of establishing their masculinity and policing one another to do so became apparent.

The control that boys had in relationships was a theme central to the young adolescents' experiences (Tolman et al., 2003). For girls, any attention from boys and men - however disrespectful or controlling or potentially dangerous - was better than no attention at all. The consistent distrust and jealousy among girls were salient topics in the focus group discussions. Girls had to wrestle with the dilemma of protecting what is theirs (i.e. their boyfriend, their relationship), while dealing with how this effort made them vulnerable to further control and domination by their boyfriends. In addition, talk about boyfriends was often laced with the provision of needed material resources tied up in heterosexual relationships. Girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds viewed boys in part as a commodity that provided certain resources (i.e. gifts, food) which the girls wanted or needed.

In summary, male aggression and dominance were naturalised and normalised by both the girls and boys in this study, suggesting that information about equity and dating violence was clearly woven into the reality of their lived and observed gendered relationships (Tolman et al., 2003). The authors argue that a simplistic message to adolescents that dating violence is "bad" does not adequately critique the larger systems which produce and perpetuate violence in intimate relationships. 'Bad' behaviours must be contextualised and analysed in order to assist youth to develop critical perspectives and viable alternatives to these forms of gendered relationships (Tolman et al., 2003). Similarly, Chung's analysis (2007; 2005) of the micro-practices of heterosexuality in Australian adolescent relationships further illuminates the gendered power relations and practices of inequality and violence. The author demonstrates that the discourses of heterosexuality and romantic love, in combination with discourses of individualism and equality, are influential in how male and female adolescents make meaning of their relationship experiences and understand intimate violence. These discourses impact on young women's capacities to negotiate an equal relationship, and in identifying, and speaking about their experiences as violent, coercive or controlling (Chung, 2005).

The female participants in this study (aged 14 to 18 years) reported a pressure to be in a relationship; they needed to have dating experience in order to successfully perform feminine heterosexuality (Chung, 2007; 2005). These young women took responsibility for the health of their relationships, and therefore, for their boyfriends' violence. The expectation on young women to privilege their boyfriends' needs over others resulted in them becoming distanced from their female friends (Chung, 2007). In addition,

commitment to the relationship resulted in an interdependence of identities, which in turn ambushed young women into speaking about and presenting their boyfriends' behaviours and identities in ways that did not tarnish their own. Certainly, the young women's interviews showed how various aspects of romantic love discourses were used to divert attention away from behaviours being interpreted as signs of male control and power (for example, jealousy and possessiveness), and instead being interpreted as signs of love, intimacy, protectiveness and commitment (Chung, 2007; 2005).

In addition, the 'individualistic discourse' and a 'discourse of equality' were two other influential discourses in young people's understandings of dating relationships, gender relations and violence in intimate relationships (Chung, 2005). Young women explained dating violence by focusing on why women remained in violent relationships; importantly, the young women did not talk about men's motivations, reasons or responsibility for their violence (Chung, 2007). Therefore, if young women are living with male violence, it can be viewed as an individual choice and failing. This individualistic discourse enables gendered power relations to be made invisible by assuming individuals make decisions and choices outside of any social structures and pressures. This discourse also encourages young women to understand violence and abuse as a problem of the individuals involved. As a result, young people must present themselves as powerful individuals with agency under all circumstances. In addition, the expectation and pressure to be in an equal relationship can lead young women to present their relationships in ways that mask inequality and abuse.

The young women in this study believed equal relationships were important, and used two particular strategies to equalise their relationships. One strategy was based on being knowledgeable about men and relationships, i.e. by understanding men's behaviour women would be immune from its sexist and unequal impacts. The second-related strategy was the use of 'emotion work' (Frith et al., 1998), a feminine strength and attribute, in order to manage the relationship (Chung, 2005). With these equalising strategies, young women assumed that men were emotionally immature and less competent communicators; this was used to explain why men behaved in unacceptable ways in relationships (Chung, 2005). Furthermore, by describing themselves as the emotional 'managers' of the relationship, young women were also solely responsible for its failure. This could result in women being complicit in minimising men's responsibility for unacceptable behaviour, and supporting essentialist understandings of

gender (Chung, 2005). According to Chung (2005), the key concern with these equalising strategies is that they do not disrupt hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Hence, young women continue to do the relationship work, whilst masculinity is left intact and unchallenged.

In summary, the above discussion points to how adolescents' experiences and definitions of violence, abuse and sexual coercion in relationships are mediated by the competing and contradictory discourses of heterosexuality, romance, gender, individualism and equality. Chung (2005) argues that although young women may presume equality as individuals, there are no cultural scripts available as to what it constitutes in a relationship. There appears to be far more knowledge available to young women about traditional heterosexual gender relations (romantic love) than there is about whether and how equal relationships can be negotiated.

### ***M.2. Conflict and voice in young women's narratives of intimate partner violence***

Tying in with the above arguments, Belknap (2000) considers how gender inequalities impact on girls and women as speakers, knowers, and actors in the world. In studying the relationships of adolescent girls, Brown and Gilligan (1992, cited in Belknap, 2000) suggested that women's psychological development within patriarchal and male-voiced societies is inherently traumatic: by adolescence, girls learn to silence their voices and to dismiss their knowledges and experiences. Instead, girls bring their self into agreement with others, and consequently learn not to speak about what they know; for many girls, this not speaking becomes not knowing. From this perspective, the central dilemma for adolescent girls is to speak honestly about what it is they know and still stay in connection with others.

Using a case study approach, Belknap (2000) presents an interpretive reading of one Mexican American woman's story of abuse, and demonstrates the methodological meaningfulness of reading for conflict and voice in the narratives of young women who have experienced abuse. The author uses Gilligan's (1982) theoretical framework in which women's central moral problem is described as a conflict between self and other.

The case study is based on an interview with Eva, who was 27 years old at the time of participation, but who experienced IPV during adolescence. The voice of psychological distress, characterised by confusion, uncertainty and dissociation, became apparent in

Eva's adolescent and adult voices. Here her voice was unreflective, and the use of 'I don't know' was pervasive in her narrative (Belknap, 2000). Gilligan (1990) refers to this as 'psychological resistance' - a reluctance to know what one knows and a fear that such knowledge, if spoken, will endanger relationships and threaten survival.

Towards the end of the interview, Eva began to talk about abuse of all women. This insistence on knowing what she knows and a willingness to be outspoken about it, can be a form of 'political resistance' (Gilligan, 1990). Here, Eva struggles against the abusive relationship by using the voice of psychological resilience: this voice speaks out against self-silencing, self-sacrifice, and self-negation, and describes capitulation in an abusive relationship as a conscious strategy used to protect one's self (Belknap, 2000).

The above readings of psychological distress and psychological resilience can be a useful framework in assisting researchers to think about the profound effect the silencing of young girls and women has on maintaining a society's tolerance of violence against women (Belknap, 2000). The silence of psychological distress immobilises women and keeps abuse out of the public eye; the voice of resilience brings attention to the problem, moves it into the public sphere, and supports the girl/woman in her efforts to manage and end the abuse or leave the relationship. It is here that the relational research interview can contribute to a transformative process – helping a woman to voice the unspoken, and to process and reframe her critical judgement of her self (Belknap, 2000).

### ***M.3. Individual and relationships processes in violent relationships***

It was noted earlier that a young woman's need for - and commitment to - an intimate relationship can result in an interdependence of identities (Chung, 2005). This next sub-theme takes a closer look at the balance of separateness and connectedness in intimate relationships, and points to the importance of considering the relational context in which violence occurs.

The concept of individuation has been conceptualised as a developmental process in which one learns to balance a sense of self as separate and a sense of self as connected (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1990). This balancing process occurs throughout life and is accomplished through continual negotiations and renegotiations of relational boundaries. Gender socialisation practices may make it difficult for men and women to

maintain this balance of self as both connected and separate (Bartle & Rosen, 1994). Failure to reconcile this dialectic may lead to fusion or lack of individuation (Karpel, 1976), which may manifest differently for men and women. Men may appear 'autonomous' due to their ambivalence about relationships, i.e. they want connection, yet are threatened by it. Women, on the other hand, may appear dependent due to their ambivalence about relationships, i.e. wanting some sense of autonomy, but being threatened by it (Bartle & Rosen, 1994). Bartle and Rosen (1994) have even suggested that violence in intimate couple relationships is, in part, a distance-regulating mechanism that maintains a balance between separateness and connectedness in the relationship. Similarly, Allison and colleagues (2008) identified 'pursuit' and 'distancing' as two strategies for regulating emotional and physical proximity within couples identified for male violence - thereby highlighting the relational basis of intimate violence. As a pursuit strategy, violence forced one partner to focus on the other, and represented an attempt to increase physical and emotional proximity. As a distancing strategy, violence served to push a partner back, and represented an attempt to decrease physical and/or emotional proximity. The authors used attachment theory as a framework for understanding the interaction patterns and relationship dynamics that occurred in these violent relationships. Notably, although the sample in this study was selected for high levels of male violence, most of the female partners had also acted violently within these relationships. These findings suggest that it's important to examine the relational context in which such behaviours are likely to arise (Allison et al., 2008). Comparably, Winstok and Eisikovits (2008) have argued that research and practice should focus on the process of escalation within couples as units, rather than aggression, and view aggression as its expression. Their study with 25 cohabiting couples showed that the developmental course of the escalatory conflict is regulated by both motivation and control elements. The results from a study with South African couples identified for male violence (Boonzaier, 2008) also found that violence was constructed as a dual, reciprocal activity and depicted as largely expressive.

Using a feminist perspective, Rosen and Bird (1996) contribute to the understanding of processes that can solidify a young woman's commitment to a relationship that is abusive and harmful. Using a longitudinal, in-depth qualitative case study of a premarital relationship in which the man had been repeatedly violent toward his female partner, they unpack some of the complex individual and relationship processes that occur in an intimate relationship where love and violence coexist (Rosen & Bird, 1996).

The authors describe how gender ideologies, the distribution of personal power and status between partners, and unresolved conflict are related to each other and to the emergence of violence and maintenance of couple bonds. In looking closely at the relationship, the authors comment on the striking incongruities in status and power (Rosen & Bird, 1996). In this particular case study, the lack of personal power made the man feel less powerful in relation to his partner, and yet his violence was his ultimate means of power and control. However, despite allowing herself to be dominated by her boyfriend in many ways, the woman continued to resist his efforts to control her. Her resistance and sense of entitlement became stronger as their relationship continued, thus shifting the commitment and power levels: her boyfriend became more committed to the relationship and she became less committed (and thus more empowered).

Another aspect of the complex role power plays in the relationship has to do with status inconsistency (Rosen & Bird, 1996). In this study, not only did the boyfriend perceive his girlfriend to have a higher social status than he (i.e. that she could more easily attract another partner), but her non-cooperation with his efforts to control the relationship became a second status inconsistency. Paradoxically, sometimes out of control conflicts ended in a deeper emotional closeness between the two partners, particularly when the man shared a side of himself that his girlfriend did not usually see. Renewed energy to pull together after a battle sometimes led to increased efforts at pleasing the other. Unfortunately, such attempts to draw closer and to avoid conflict often led to a gradual build-up of tension in the relationship (Rosen & Bird, 1996).

In this study the boyfriend's sense of entitlement coexisting with his sense of low personal power presented a toxic combination. His girlfriend's fairly high sense of personal power seemed to threaten him; at the same time, her intense need for an intimate relationship and her willingness and ability to nurture the relationship increased their attachment to each other (Rosen & Bird, 1996).

In a sense, this study, which takes a microscopic look at how love and violence coexisted in an intimate relationship, illustrates how the political becomes personal (Rosen & Bird, 1996). It reminds us that although contextual processes shape violence against women, the violence is inflicted and experienced in the lives of individuals.

#### ***M.4. Sexual coercion in South African adolescent relationships***

It is important to note that an explicit mention of the nature and impact of sexual abuse in the context of violent intimate relationships seems to be missing or underplayed in many studies of adolescent relationships. Certainly, in South Africa, research has highlighted the violence-sexuality connection and its critical importance in the discussion of youth reproductive health (Wood & Jewkes, 1998b). Wood and colleagues (1998b) explored the coercive sexual dynamics operating in ongoing relationships of 14-year-old pregnant Xhosa-speaking South African adolescents. In the adolescents' narratives, having sexual intercourse and being available sexually implied an agreement to love. The construction that being "in love" means you are committing to having sex were derived by the men, and was often the major reason for girls deciding to initiate and maintain sexual activity.

Although they were aware that sex was part of the relationship contract, most teenagers were able to identify when they were coerced or deceived into the sexual act itself. The majority of these teenagers' sexual initiation was characterised by violence, ranging from emotional intimidation and threats to physical beatings. Of the 24 informants 22 reported having been beaten by their partners on multiple occasions, and girls reported assault in instances when they attempted to refuse sexual intercourse (Wood & Jewkes, 1998b). The term "forced" was used repeatedly and was positioned on a continuum of coercion, starting with male "pleading" and "persuading" and escalating to assault by hitting and beating. Forced intercourse and assault were perceived to be a male strategy for "getting you to love him", and were not defined as rape (Wood & Jewkes, 1998b). Similarly, girls in the Mbale district of Uganda have articulated a range of non-consensual behaviours, from emotional pressure to physical force, with which they are familiar, including "being strongly convinced", to "boys trying to grope you", to "abuse from boys", to "rape" (Hulton et al., 2000). A study with male and female unmarried Filipino adolescents (ages 15 to 19 years) also revealed variations in the mechanisms of sexual coercion (Serquina-Ramiro, 2005). Verbal insistence was most common among females, whereas bribery was more significantly applied to young men. In some respects, the dividing line between sexual negotiation and sexual coercion seemed obscure. For instance, 'sweet talking' was a method that could be construed as negotiating and, at the same time, coercive. This study also highlighted the extent to which coercive sex can be consensual; a number of respondents admitted having



eventually agreed to engage in physical intimacy with their partners after a series of persuasions, sweet talking, pleading and bribery (Serquina-Ramiro, 2005).

For the South African Xhosa-speaking adolescents, peer pressure and the fear of peer ostracism reinforced the pressure for them to engage sexually (Wood & Jewkes, 1998b). The girls reported that accepting sex was a strategy used to avoid peer ostracism and that not revealing sexual abuse was the norm amongst female friends. Female peers also appeared to mystify sex, and to not engage in a process of challenging male definitions and constructions of love, intercourse and entitlement. An absence of sexual knowledge, reinforced by the taboo nature of the intergenerational transmission of sexual information, meant that adolescent girls were initiated through the sexual act into sexual matters by men (Wood & Jewkes, 1998b).

Certainly, ethnographic research on relationships of young people in South Africa has highlighted an overwhelming preoccupation among young men to ensure the sexual availability of women. Interviews with Xhosa youth in the Eastern Cape of South Africa (Wood et al., 1998a) showed that violence was used by boys as a way of imposing the 'rules' of the relationship and was particularly associated with girl's rejections of 'proposals of love', their attempts to end relationships, their refusals of sex, their attempts to check up on their boyfriend's fidelity, their attempts to undermine their boyfriend's success with other women and their actual or suspected infidelity. Gaining and keeping girlfriends or boyfriends were overwhelming preoccupations of the youth. Their male and female identities were substantially constructed in terms of success in sexual relationships and this was deployed in struggles for position and status within peer groups.

Importantly, the results from the above studies suggest that South African adolescents were for the most part aware of power differentials, inequities and double standards operating within constructions of love and sexual intercourse, but that resistance was complex in the extreme because of male violence and the immediacy of peer pressure (Wood et al., 1998a; Wood & Jewkes, 1998b).

In summary, violence within adolescent intimate partner relationships is a critical area for examination and future screening. Violence partially defines adolescents' capacity to protect themselves against HIV, STIs, pregnancy and unwanted sexual intercourse

(Wood et al., 1998); therefore, the implications of non-consensual sexual experiences for young people's rights, health and development and the risks they pose in the transition to adulthood are enormous and of special concern (Jejeebhoy & Bott, 2003).

Although it is known that many female adolescents experience sexual coercion in their relationships, less is known about the complex stories of intimate partner violence possibly culminating in non-consensual experiences. A more nuanced understanding of the different manifestations and dynamics of violence, and how both male and female youth give meaning - and respond - to it, is needed. Qualitative research that considers how intimate partner violence operates within these relationships is essential in informing future interventions. This study's analysis of male and female talk and constructions of intimate partnerships can contribute to better understandings of the abusive dynamics operating within young people's relationships.

#### ***M.5. Adolescents and youth: their views on dating violence***

In the last decade, more attention has been devoted to understanding relationship violence involving adolescents, specifically dating violence. Longitudinal and retrospective studies show that violence inflicted or sustained during the early dating period is often a forerunner of later violence (Himelein, 1995; Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995; O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994; Gidycz, Coble, Latham, & Layman, 1993), thus highlighting the importance of understanding more thoroughly the first manifestations of abusive patterns in teen relationships (Lavoie, Robitaille, & Hebert, 2000).

Research on dating violence in adolescent relationships traditionally uses quantitative methods to assess prevalence, correlates and health effects (Flisher, Myer, Marais, Lombard, & Reddy, 2007; Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, & Hannan, 2003; Glass et al., 2003). Violence is often measured using various instruments including the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). While this approach yields important information regarding the occurrence and nature of dating violence, it does not further our understanding of the context in which violence occurs (Murphy & O'Leary, 1994), or the meaning of dating violence from the perspectives of adolescents (Ismail, Berman, & Ward-Griffin, 2005). It is argued that the perceptions of adolescents themselves with respect to explanatory models of dating violence is essential in order to plan valid and developmentally appropriate interventions (Lavoie et al., 2000).

Similarly, most studies about dating violence within the context of a college or university setting only examine the prevalence and incidence of the problem (Rennison & Rand, 2003; Smith, White, & Holland, 2003; Daley & Noland, 2001). However, some researchers have used open-ended questionnaires to describe and explore other aspects of intimate violence in these populations. For instance, open-ended questionnaires have been used to ascertain how American college students understand the causes of violence in heterosexual dating relationships. For 107 undergraduate students (68 female, 39 male) at a public US university, categories of causal explanation of dating violence included: power, gender socialisation, relationship, communication, alcohol and individual (Mahlstedt & Welsh, 2005). Relationship and communication problems were primary causes when dating violence was presented in a concrete situation, whereas power and gender socialisation were primary causes when presented as a social problem. These differences suggest that when participants are presented with details of a concrete situation they focus on individual and interpersonal explanations; they lose sight of the structural explanations of violence against women (power and gender socialisation) in which individual and interpersonal behaviours are embedded. Of the six variables, alcohol was the least mentioned overall. Participants in this study acknowledged power as an important cause, which suggests feminist structural frameworks in which relationship violence is embedded may lead to effective prevention education (Mahlstedt & Welsh, 2005).

Berkel and colleagues (2005) were particularly interested in how Black college women defined and explained abusive relationships. An examination of the responses of 64 Black female students revealed some potential vulnerabilities or risk factors around issues of dating and courtship violence. The participants were much more likely to list physical and verbal abuse as being characteristic of abusive relationships; a relatively small number of women included sexual abuse in their definitions. Another potential vulnerability became evident when the authors asked participants to share their beliefs about the causes of abuse in relationships. The women identified, among other things, characteristics of the abused. This suggested that to some extent respondents viewed victims' low self-esteem and insecurity as at least partially contributing to abuse in African American relationships (Berkel et al., 2005). Only one in three respondents stated that if she were to find herself a victim of abuse that she would leave or get help. The authors suggest that one social factor that may inhibit Black women's help-seeking is the belief that there are a limited number of eligible Black men available to date or

marry. Certainly, focus group research with African American women has highlighted the importance of understanding racial loyalty in an African American woman's decision to pursue outside support for domestic violence (Bent-Goodley, 2004).

In another study, 210 American female college students between the ages of 18 and 25 years (mean age of 19 years), gave written responses to an open-ended question about the impact of dating violence on their daily lives (Frederick Amar & Alexy, 2005). The major thematic categories that emerged were: emotional distress; distrust and using extra precautions; disconnected and distant in relationships; self-discontentment; disclaiming the experience; feeling disenfranchised; life disruption; and turning a situation from disempowering to empowering. The overarching theme of the narrative notes was "'dissed' by dating violence", i.e. being purposefully dismissed, maltreated or discarded.

Female and male youths' views on violence within their dating relationships have also been explored using qualitative focus group methods (Johnson et al., 2005; Black & Weisz, 2004; Lavoie et al., 2000). Focus groups provide a means for an in-depth investigation of a topic with a small group of participants and allow for the exploration of new areas. The focus group consists of a planned discussion with the objective of gathering perceptions about a precise sphere of interest (Krueger, 1988). The dynamic character of the focus group enables access to information that would be difficult to obtain without group interaction (Morgan, 1988). A focus group gives access to language and concepts participants use to structure their experience; it allows for observation of social interaction between participants, and is also considered particularly useful in facilitating culturally sensitive research (Lavoie et al., 2000; Hughes & DuMont, 1993).

Results from focus group studies suggest that gender violence affects the lives of youths from a range of different communities (including immigrant, low-income and urban areas). The influence of culture is often reflected in youths' endorsement of certain gender stereotypes and their decisions about whom to turn to for help when experiencing or witnessing gender-violence (Black & Weisz, 2004). Focus group discussions with Mexican-American youth (ages 11 to 17 years) (Black & Weisz, 2004), African-American urban adolescents (ages 14 to 22 years) (Johnson et al., 2005), male and female middle-school urban youth (ages 11 to 13 years) (Fredland et al., 2005)

and male and female Canadian adolescents (Sears, Byers, Whelan, & Saint-Pierre, 2006; Lavoie et al., 2000), have shown that young adolescents experience gender-based violence in a number of social roles: as witnesses to domestic violence at home, as victims of intimate partner and dating violence, or as peer observers of harassing and violent behaviour. The subcategories of violence identified by youth were physical abuse, death threats, sexual abuse, psychological abuse including denigration and insults, social control through excessive jealousy, indifference, threats of separation and reprisals, damaging reputations, and harassment after separation (Lavoie et al., 2000).

Amongst American middle-school youth (Fredland et al., 2005), boys indicated that arguments and the use of violence were mainly due to cheating, jealousy, disrespect and sexual issues. Girls stated that drugs, drinking, unwanted touching, lying, name calling, being ignored in public, and broken promises (particularly involving material things) started arguments. Both girls and boys identified cheating as the most likely cause of fights.

Although many male youth described gender-based violence as an emotional catharsis that could help relieve frustration, many felt that other males used violence against their partners to bolster their self-esteem, punish disrespect and maintain a sense of power over their partners (Johnson et al., 2005; Black & Weisz, 2004). Across studies, jealousy was cited by both genders as a reason for violence, and females struggled to determine if excessive jealousy could be interpreted as proof of love (Johnson et al., 2005; Lavoie et al., 2000). In addition, some girls thought that accepting abuse was a good way to secure the interest of a man with whom they were seeking a relationship (Johnson et al., 2005).

Canadian youth (Lavoie et al., 2000) clearly perceived violence as a climate of long-term fear rather than a series of gestures, and both boys and girls knew that violence did not necessarily stop with the end of a relationship. Although most participants were aware of forms of abuse other than physical, older girls were more able to recognise the pernicious aspect of psychological violence in intimate relationships.

There is one form of psychologically abusive behaviour that appears to be specific or at least more important to adolescent relationships compared to the literature on marital violence: damaging a partner's reputation after a single date or after breaking off a

lengthy relationship (Lavoie et al., 2000). Given that girls are more vulnerable to having their reputations damaged due to the double standard applied to sexual behaviour, girls may choose to endure abusive relationships due to fear of reprisals, gossip and exclusion from their peers (Fredland et al., 2005; Tolman et al., 2003; Lavoie et al., 2000). Certainly, peer pressure is probably the most influential force on young adolescents (Fredland et al., 2005). Young women describe pressures from peers and the media to have boyfriends and develop committed relationships at a young age (Ismail et al., 2005). These pressures, together with romantic notions about relationships, can amplify young women's willingness to tolerate violence.

As noted earlier, many researchers argue that the contexts of abusive acts are key to adolescents' perceptions of dating violence (Lavoie et al., 2000; Jackson, 1999; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). The importance adolescents place on context for defining specific behaviours as abusive was underscored by focus group research with Canadian high school students (Sears et al., 2006). Although girls and boys were able to list behaviours that may be physically or psychologically abusive, they emphasised that it is the situation - not the behaviour - that determines whether a behaviour is abusive. This study also revealed gender differences in the criteria boys and girls used to make that judgement. Specifically, boys tended to focus on the intent of the behaviour, and described behaviours as abusive if the intent was negative, whereas girls tended to describe behaviours as abusive if the impact was negative (e.g. if it caused physical harm, fear or anger) (Sears et al., 2006).

Importantly, the above focus group studies suggest that both male and female perspectives on gender-based violence are informed by watching peers navigate their own relationships, thus the early social learning process may be particularly important for gender-based violence (Johnson et al., 2005). Furthermore, these studies reveal that adolescents have sophisticated insight into gender-based violence, and that they don't talk about violence without discussing relationships and gender-based violence.

## **N. Typologies of dating violence**

In recent years, researchers have been concerned with developing typologies or classification systems in order to better evaluate intimate partner violence. As an example, Roberts (2006) developed a five-level classification typology detailing the

duration and severity of woman 'battering' (short-term victims; intermediate; intermittent/long-term; chronic and severe with a regular pattern; and homicidal), and suggests that such a system can provide a framework continuum for evaluating abused women and improving risk assessments of dangerousness.

Focusing more on the motivations behind the use of intimate partner violence, this next theme summarises recent research that has concentrated on identifying different types of partner violence relationships. Researchers argue that results from studies conducted with one population (e.g. women seeking shelter from abusive partners) should not be generalised to all aggressive relationships (Johnson, 1995). Rosen and colleagues (2005) suggest that by clearly delineating types of IPV found in different settings, researchers can attempt to explain patterns in relationships in which men, women, or both partners are aggressive. These differing patterns are characterised by the level of control asserted by each partner across violent incidents within the relationship as well as the motivations behind the perpetration of various violent acts (Rosen et al., 2005; Johnson, 1995).

Johnson and Ferraro (2000) distinguished between four major patterns of control that constitute partner violence: "common couple violence", "intimate terrorism", "violent resistance", and "mutual violent control". Common couple violence (CCV) is an intermittent pattern of violence perpetrated by either one or both partners in response to occasional conflicts with a motive to be in control of a specific situation (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Johnson, 1995). CCV is a couple dynamic in which conflicts may unintentionally escalate to minor violence. Unlike the other three patterns of violence, couples who experience CCV are not likely to be found in samples drawn from shelters, court-ordered or medical populations (Rosen et al., 2005).

Intimate terrorism (IT) is a pattern of behaviours in which one partner (primarily men) desire to gain broad control over his or her partner. IT often involves both violent and non-violent acts, as well as emotionally abusive behaviours. Violent resistance (VR) is a pattern of violence in which the victim (more likely women) uses violent and non-violent acts in order to retaliate against a partner's attempt to control. Mutual violent control (MVC) is a pattern of violence in which both partners use violent and non-violent acts to exert control over one another and the relationship (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Although this category implies mutual violence, it remains important to

distinguish between the severity of violence committed by men versus women (Rosen et al., 2005).

Johnson and Ferraro's typology (2000) outlined above was further tested by Rosen and colleagues (2005) through in-depth interviews with a community sample of bidirectionally violent couples. Fifteen American couples in which both partners were either emotionally or physically abusive based on their responses to the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) were interviewed separately. They found couples who fit the description of three of the four types of partner violence: 'common couple violence' (CCV), 'mutual violent control' (MVC), and 'violent resistance' (VR). There seems to be a likely explanation for the lack of couples that fit the 'intimate terrorism' (IT) category: given that the authors had recruited couples primarily through newspaper advertisements, which called for couples who were concerned about conflict in their relationships, it seemed unlikely that an abused woman who was terrorised by her partner would have felt safe enough to suggest participation in a research study (Rosen et al., 2005). This lack of representation suggests that IPV can no longer be considered a singular phenomenon.

The above study identified some diversity in couples that were classified as CCV (common couple violence) - especially with regards to motivation for using violence. Some couples seemed to battle for control of the relationship, one argument at a time, with neither partner being the dominant one; in these situations violence, although mild, often seemed to have an instrumental motivation. In contrast, there were couples in which violence tended to erupt during conflict cycles that got out of control; here violence was most often expressive in nature (Rosen et al., 2005). Similarly, emotional abuse, like physical abuse, had both an expressive and instrumental motivation, and was often the primary means of exerting a general pattern of control in the relationship.

Similarly, male violence has previously been viewed simultaneously as an instrumental and as an expressive act (Goldner et al., 1990). As an instrumental act, violence is a powerful strategy of intimidation in order to control or regain control over a partner. As an expressive act, "violence is an extreme reaction during an emotion-evoking encounter in the context of a highly fused, highly charged relationship in which partners believe they have an exaggerated impact on each other" (Bartle & Rosen, 1994, p.227).



In general, Rosen and colleagues (2005) reported experiencing difficulties in categorising some of the couples in their study based on descriptions of types provided in the literature. They highlight the importance of typologies being simple and clear enough to use in clinical decisions, and suggest that researchers pay close attention to the practical significance of their empirically derived typologies.

In line with Johnson and Ferraro's typologies (2000) demonstrating the complexity of adult domestic violence perpetration, Foshee and colleagues (2007) identified typologies of dating violence perpetration by adolescents. In-depth interviews were conducted with 116 girls and boys (ages 17 or 18 years) previously identified by an acts scale as perpetrators of dating violence. For boys and girls in this study, many acts considered violent by the acts scale were subsequently recanted or described as non-violent. From the narratives, the authors identified four types of female perpetration that were distinguished by motives, precipitating events, and the abuse history of the partners; one type of perpetration accounted for most acts by boys.

The most common female type of violence perpetration was labelled as "patriarchal terrorism response": in these cases, girls reported using violence in order to defend against a boyfriend who had systematically tried to control her for some time with physical and psychological abuse (Foshee, Bauman, Linder, Rice, & Wilcher, 2007). The next two most common female types of violence were motivated by anger and a sense of wrongdoing on the part of the boyfriend (Foshee et al., 2007). Here the girl's violence took place in the absence of evidence that the boyfriend had a history of being abusive. The "wrongs" done by a boyfriend that elicited the girl's use of violence were his sexual infidelity, flirting with another girl, drinking too much alcohol, "talking ugly" to her, walking away from her in an argument, putting too much pressure on her to have sex, and making too many social blunders on prom night.

Overall, more than half of violent acts reported by adolescent girls were described as acts done in response to violence initiated by the boyfriend. For boys, most of the acts were classified as "escalation prevention": violence used to prevent the escalation of female physical fighting. In more than half of the cases, the boy explained that the girl used violence or acted like she was going to use violence because he had cheated on her or because she was jealous of another girl. The findings thus provide some support for

the explanation that females do often use violence in self-defence; though it indicates that this is true for males as well (Foshee et al., 2007).

Foshee and colleagues (2007) use their findings to raise some difficult questions. For instance, what criteria should be used to inform prevention and treatment priorities: the prevalence of perpetration types, the potential for injury, the motivation for the violence, or something else?

### **O. Considering methodological issues in intimate partner violence research**

The final theme in my literature review veers significantly away from the preceding discussion, and attends to methodological issues in IPV research – an issue I have referred to throughout this literature review chapter. I chose to end with a theme that again underscores the importance of researchers being positionally reflexive in how they conduct and analyse their qualitative research. In line with my research, the studies discussed here incorporate methodological frameworks that consider the interactive and contextual construction of IPV narratives, and the process of negotiation and meaning-making between interviewer and interviewee.

Enosh and Buchbinder (2005) consider the interactive construction of narrative styles in sensitive interviews, looking particularly at the case of domestic violence research. Their article focuses on the process of negotiating the definition of a couple's reality as transacted between interviewer and interviewee. Interviews conducted with 'battered' women and 'batterers' are used to understand the co-construction of the narrative of domestic violence.

The above article is based on a reanalysis of interviews conducted in Israel as part of a larger research program that was constructed to gain an understanding of the emic perspective of couples living together while involved in domestic violence. The authors highlight the following methodological premises informing their work: they acknowledge and emphasise the active role and contribution of the interviewer in the process of interviewing and narrative production; they emphasise the possible conflicting agendas of interviewers and interviewees; and they keep the issue of power relationships in interviews at the forefront of their analytical framework. Here the

authors define power as “the power to define the studied social reality” (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b, p.614).

The emergent narrative styles of the constructions of domestic violence were shown to be the product of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Four different narrative styles were identified: the narrative style as a struggle, as deflection, as negotiation and as a self-observation process (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b). The emerging narrative styles ranged from an obvious and overt struggle on the one hand to cooperation on the other. At the conflictual end of the range, the interview became a clear-cut power struggle between interviewer and interviewee, in which each sought to prioritise or force his or her definition of the couple’s reality on the other, a struggle that usually ended unresolved. At the other end of the range, the interaction between interviewer and interviewee was characterised as a cooperative effort by both sides to facilitate a reflective recall of events, processes, and emotions by the interviewee. Although most women tended to be more cooperative, all narrative styles (to be seen on a continuum) were exemplified in both genders (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b).

The analysis of the narratives indicates that the more the interviewees insisted on a definition of reality different from the interviewers’, the more conflictual their interaction became. Such interviews were characterised by denial, minimisation, deflection and the use of abstract generalities instead of detailed and process-based recollection; and vice versa, the more receptive the interviewee was to the definition of reality as presented by the interviewer, the more the narrative was characterised by self-reflection and willingness to recollect events in detail and as processes (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b).

This study suggests that understanding the inherent gap between the interviewer’s assumptions concerning the interviewee’s reality, and the interviewee’s reluctance to face such a reality should be the first stepping-stone for any research on sensitive issues (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b). Rather than driving toward getting the interviewee to reveal the “hidden reality” (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b, p.613), this study highlights the importance of interviewers trying to understand the interviewee’s own definitional and meaning-making processes. Within my research, I consciously attempted to understand the interviewees’ fundamental assumptions, their way of assigning meaning to events in their lives, and their goals in the interview. As explained by Enosh and

Buchbinder (2005b), this approach enabled me to recognise those participants with whom I could achieve a reflective discourse, those with whom I had to negotiate and those for whom the process was not productive. Similarly, I had to be aware of my own assumptions, meaning-making processes and definitional language, and how these influenced the interviews.

Enosh and Buchbinder's study (2005b) illustrates how a qualitative interview is a "communicative event" (p.589) with both referential and indexical levels. The referential level refers to the content of what is being said, whereas on the indexical level, the focus is on the features of the context in which the communication occurs. The authors emphasise that interviews are highly contextual and co-constructed events; they cannot be treated as independent of the transaction between interviewer and interviewee, or perceived as accurately reflecting the interviewees' subjective experience (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b). Analysis in qualitative studies must therefore not only attend to the referential level - the focus on the content of what was said and how it is understood, but also at the indexical level - the interaction that has taken place between researcher and informant. Such an indexical level may give rise to new and at times completely different meanings on the referential level (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b).

With a similar focus on the relationship between methodology and meaning, Gadd (2004) uses a case study to explore how his pursuit of a coherent account in a narrative interview reduced the participant's willingness to 'open up' about his experiences with IPV. Here the object of investigation is the impact of the author's/researcher's defensiveness on the interview interaction and the process of analysis.

In his doctoral research, Gadd (2004) was interested in exploring whether the contradictory and ambiguous quality of men's accounts of their own behaviour could be rendered more comprehensible if considered in terms of the psychoanalytic notion of the 'defended subject'. The notion of 'defended subject' requires the researcher-as-analyst to presume an interviewee whose speech is underscored by biographically-rooted unconscious anxieties and desires. The method of biographical-interpreting requires separating out text structures from 'internal realities'. These 'internal realities' explicitly come into focus when the researcher undertakes the 'microanalyses' of

interview transcripts, and consequently hypothesises about what motivated the interviewee's disclosures (Gadd, 2004).

In an interview with a participant the author used these biographical-interpretive psychoanalytic principles to hypothesise about unconscious or latent meanings and motivations manifesting in the narrative. In this case, Gadd (2004) struggled to find a meaning frame from which to make sense of the interviewee's story. He interpreted the participant's reluctance or unwillingness to acknowledge the violence as evidence of something between denial and dishonesty. However, a subsequent analysis of the case illustrated that the kind of knowledge that was constructed in the research interview depended not only on the interviewee's actual biographical experiences, but also, and perhaps more importantly, on the interviewer effects, and the intersubjective dynamics between the two concerned parties (Gadd, 2004).

With the method of biographical-interpreting, the meaning of a narrative is largely determined by the interviewer who also has the majority of power and control over the interaction and direction of interaction in the interview. This study argues that, had the author as interviewer in this case been more sensitive to what the participant wanted to tell him, and had he pursued the stories that the interviewee's responses suggested he wished to, he might have been able to resolve the puzzles the interviewee's narrative presented more adequately. Gadd (2004) presents a long excerpt from the interview to demonstrate how he prioritised his desire to get at the facts over and above a respect for the interviewee's vulnerable feelings. Such responses seemed to leave the interviewee with more doubts about the validity and legitimacy of his own memories. Gadd (2004) concludes that the effect of this approach was not to 'open' the interviewee up, but to put him on the defensive.

After the initial fieldwork had concluded the author came to perceive this particular participant's account as "less authentic and meaningful" (Gadd, 2004, p.396) than most of the others he had gathered. He felt that the participant had failed to provide the more or less "authoritative, intelligible, unfolding and unidirectional narrative" (p. 396) he had come to expect of 'good' interviewees. The author blamed the participant for this failing. Without returning to the transcripts of their interviews, the author decided not to use this participant's account within his doctoral thesis. The interviewee's account

therefore failed to convince because he was not able to deploy the rhetorical devices the author expected 'authentic' informants to use.

The above case study highlights the importance of critically unpacking our assumptions about 'authentic' or 'good' narratives. Had the author been able to identify his defensiveness/assumptions earlier in the research process, the interviewee might have found the reflective space he needed to convey the complexities of his experience (Gadd, 2004). In this second analysis, Gadd (2004) turns the gaze upon himself, and questions what his own defences might have been, and how they shaped the interaction. In retrospect, Gadd (2004) finds the narrative itself the more interesting detail, and is more sensitive to incorporating an understanding of the contexts through which the interview was produced. His subsequent positional reflexivity leads to new insight into how he was playing a constitutive role in the production of the interview, and opens up alternative readings of the data.

In summary, the studies of Enosh and Buchbinder (2005b) and Gadd (2004) encourage researchers to consider how their positionality and methodology informed the process of their data creation, and their subsequent meaning-making of the data.

In conclusion, this literature review chapter presented a comprehensive discussion of 15 themes that were identified across 109 qualitative research papers on intimate partner violence. Where relevant, the qualitative methodological approaches used were critiqued, and at various points throughout the chapter I positioned my own preferred methodological stance. Against the backdrop of qualitative research findings into IPV in general, this review has highlighted the value and need for narrative analytical approaches in IPV research, with a particular emphasis on the interactive, performative and discursive nature of IPV narratives. The next chapter presents the epistemological, methodological and analytical frameworks of my study, and includes a discussion of the theory and methods of my data creation and data analysis.

## CHAPTER 3

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS OF CURRENT STUDY

Mantzoukas (2004) emphasises that researchers conducting qualitative inquiries must identify their epistemological and ontological frameworks with clarity at the commencement of their studies. This will enable their studies to bear a sense of validity and reliability. By doing this, researchers identify to their readers the rules by which they have agreed to work and against which they should be judged. In addition, if the researcher is to help readers understand and assess the value of the research, he or she must state clearly all the way through the study his or her decisions, why they were made, and how they relate to the fundamental epistemological and ontological propositions that have been clearly stated beforehand. This will ensure the dependability and credibility of a study.

Certainly in this thesis, the values, assumptions, knowledge-claims and vocabulary of my particular qualitative research approach directly informed decisions and discussions throughout all aspects of the research process. In this chapter I will outline my research approach by discussing the following sections:

- 3.1. Epistemological background: ways of working and positioning myself as researcher
- 3.2. Methodological framework of post-modern qualitative research
- 3.3. Theory and methods of data creation: Unstructured interactive interviews
- 3.4. Theory and methods of narrative analysis
- 3.5. Analytical framework of narrative analysis: An interactional, performative and narrative-discursive research approach

### **3.1. Epistemological background: ways of working and positioning myself as researcher**

In this section I outline the ways of working of both narrative and collaborative therapists, and explain how these therapeutic practices, and their epistemological underpinnings of social-constructionism informed my positioning as researcher in this study.

#### ***3.1.1. Ways of working: Narrative and collaborative therapies***

In various professional disciplines today, a number of different practices are inspired or informed by narrative inquiry. Gergen and Gergen (2006) argue that more effort must be spent considering narratives in action, the ways in which narrative ideas can and do function within various practical settings. Psychotherapy (and I will argue research interviews) is one domain in which narratives are in action.

My preferred ways of working as a clinical psychologist have largely been influenced by two contemporary therapy approaches: narrative and collaborative therapies. Both of these approaches share similar epistemological premises, and have partly informed how I have positioned myself both as a therapist in general and as a researcher in this particular study.

In this next section I will provide a brief summary of narrative and collaborative therapies (Monk & Gehart, 2003), and outline the various epistemological premises that have informed the practices of my study. Although there are practice similarities that arise from the theoretical assumptions underpinning narrative and collaborative therapies, these approaches have been contrasted by describing the positioning of the narrative practitioner as socio-political activist and the collaborative practitioner as conversational partner (Monk & Gehart, 2003). I will discuss each of these positions and describe how they were reflected in my role as research interviewer in this study.

##### **3.1.1.1. Narrative Therapy**

Narrative therapy is based on the notion that narratives organise experience and generate meaning. People make meaning of their lives by organising key events into stories, which they then incorporate into a larger life narrative (White & Epston, 1990;



Bruner, 1986a; Bruner, 1986b). White and Epston (1990), central figures in the development of narrative therapy, emphasise the importance of how people story their experience and perform these stories in their lives; they posit that stories are not only descriptive but also constitutive.

Narrative therapy is further premised on the idea that the lives and relationships of people are shaped by the knowledges and stories that communities of people negotiate and engage in to give meaning to their experiences. Stories are therefore social constructs, arrived at through interaction and experience with other people in a particular historical-cultural context (Gergen, 2001; Combs & Freedman, 1996).

In addition, not only do these stories determine the meaning that people give to experience, but these stories also largely determine which aspects of experience people select out for expression. Furthermore, inasmuch as action is prefigured on meaning-making, these stories determine real effects in terms of the shaping of people's lives (White, 1992). However, narratives do not encompass the full richness of our lives, and there are many lived experiences that are not storied. Such untold stories have inspired narrative therapy's interest in 'unique outcomes' (White, 1992).

Michael Foucault is a figure who has significantly influenced narrative therapy. Foucault (1980) emphasised how personal narratives are subjugated by dominant discourses that maintains the status quo in relationships, families and communities. White (1992) in turn developed strategies that assisted people to gain access to story lines and practices previously subjugated by the family's and culture's dominant discourses as to what is expected. Narrative therapists thus aim to liberate people from society's normalising and marginalising practices that determine what is acceptable and unacceptable (Monk & Gehart, 2003). They furthermore argue for 'alternative knowledges' that derive from those populations often excluded from power.

In essence, a narrative therapy approach is concerned with the client's personal story and the way in which this story embodies and sustains the problems the client brings into therapy. The goal of narrative therapy is to explore, unpack and transform narrative constructions so as to enhance client well-being. Therapists help clients to construct alternative interpretations of their life circumstances and assist them in becoming aware of the social/cultural forces impinging upon them (Gergen & Gergen, 2006).

Importantly, this is not just a matter of inventing a new discourse, but constructing a new narrative that is both believable and actionable (Gergen & Gergen, 2006).

### **3.1.1.2. Collaborative Therapies**

As summarised by Monk and Gehart (2003), collaborative therapies share several common practices, most notably, a) an egalitarian, not-knowing stance; b) the generation of multiple perspectives to create new meaning; and c) non-interventionist intentions in therapy. Grounding themselves in the constructionist assumption that socially designated ‘experts’ (e.g. therapists *or researchers*) do not possess inherently superior or ‘objective’ knowledge about ‘truth’ and experience, Anderson and Goolishian (1992) underscored the curious posture of the therapist to learn more about the meanings attached to human behaviour. They were the first to specifically propose that therapists maintain a ‘not-knowing’ stance in therapeutic interactions. From this collaborative, non-hierarchical stance, therapists encourage a dialogue by actively inviting clients to bring their subjective views and interpretations into the conversation. This not-knowing stance elicits multiple, contradictory voices into therapeutic conversations, which allows participants and therapists (and *researchers*) to generate and explore new perspectives and meanings together. As differing understandings and perspectives about a ‘problem’ are exchanged in a dialogical process that is not aimed at generating a single problem description, the participants’ construction of the problem(s) shifts, allowing for new thoughts, emotions, and actions in relation to the problem (Monk & Gehart, 2003).

Both narrative and collaborative therapists stay as much as possible in a position of “not knowing” (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992): their intention is to engage in collaborative, horizontal relationships in which people choose stories they prefer and make their own meanings about those preferred stories (Combs & Freedman, 1996). In my study, I adopted this particular stance, and other narrative ideas (Epston, 1998), to create a research interview context that did the following: invited a reflexive posture and demanded that as researcher I be accountable for my relational stance; privileged the interviewee’s lived experience; encouraged multiple perspectives and acted to deconstruct claims of ‘expert knowledge’; acknowledged that stories are co-produced and endeavoured to make the interviewee the privileged author of his/her own experiences; believed that participants are multistoried; and engaged participants in conversations that were honouring of their knowledges of life.

As is the case with narrative therapy, I focused my interviews on opening a dialogue with the participants where I engaged in their inter-subjective processes of knowing and being known. This also entailed a demystification of both myself as researcher and the process of the interview (Monk & Gehart, 2003; Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; White & Epston, 1990).

### ***3.1.2. Social-constructionist foundations of narrative and collaborative therapies***

#### **3.1.2.1. No Singular, Objective Truth**

Both narrative and collaborative therapy approaches have much in common with a social constructionist epistemology, and are grounded in similar social constructionist assumptions about reality and knowledge (Monk & Gehart, 2003; Gergen, 2001). From a social constructionist perspective, reality is not singular, objective, or something to be studied “out there”, but rather it is something we create and something that can change (Monk & Gehart, 2003). As a social constructionist researcher I recognise the complexity and multiplicity in human functioning and accept that one cannot obtain essential understandings about experience and existence. Throughout the interview and research process I tried to maintain a keen awareness of how context, interpretation and interaction influenced the meanings that emerged.

#### **3.1.2.2. Language as Formative**

A central epistemological focus in my study is on language as a primary means of constructing meaning. Social constructionist epistemology emphasises how human experience, action and meaning-making are always mediated by language (Gergen, 2001). Furthermore, words are not thought of as having meaning in and of themselves, but rather they derive their meaning from the contexts in which they are produced or constructed. Rather than being a passive, representational medium, language is constructed in an active and relational way, with real effects (Monk & Gehart, 2003).

A social-constructionist research framework therefore demands a reflexive gaze on discourse - turning language back on itself to see the work it does in constituting the world. We must know that we use language and to some extent how we use it, and with what effect (Davies et al., 2004). Through the listening to spoken stories during interviews, and through one’s questions and answers, the aim is to open up a space in which the participants’ stories do not become merely autobiographical, but also a means

of making visible the discursive processes in which participants are caught up. One tries to attend to the language and discourses through which participants, and oneself as researcher, make meanings.

### **3.1.2.3. A relational view of self**

Social constructionist therapists maintain that one's identity or personhood is developed, sustained, and transformed in and through relationships, both immediate and within the society at large (Gergen, 2001). This relational description of self and identity is markedly distinct from the modernist emphasis on lone individuality and fixed personality structures (Monk & Gehart, 2003).

The prevailing view of self in contemporary Western culture is of the autonomous, separate individual, characterised by individualistic notions of autonomy, independence, separation-individuation and power (Fishbane, 2001). In contrast, a social constructionist and post-modern perspectives challenge the narrative of a separate-self. Rather than locating self-identity and meaning making solely within the mind of the individual, identity and the self are also seen as socially constructed (Gergen, 2001; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). A relational view of self views self-conception - not as an individual's personal and private cognitive structure - but as discourse about the self, which takes place between people in context (Gergen, 1991).

A relational narrative considers the dynamics of connection and disconnection in relationship, and focuses on the challenge of balancing connection with self - through self-empathy, authenticity, clarity, voice - and connection with other (Jordan, 1997, cited in Fishbane, 2001). From this perspective, Fishbane (2001) views autonomy as including both clarity about one's own needs and desires, and a "readiness for the relational" - which entails (Fishbane, 2001) "a willingness to be moved by the other, to see and be seen, to stay connected even through conflict, to hear the other's narrative even while articulating one's own, and to negotiate differences without resorting to "power over" tactics" (p.276). Readiness for the relational also entails relational accountability to the other, and an openness to being affected by the other's response (Mirkin, 1994, cited in Fishbane, 2001). In this context, power and authenticity are seen as the ability to have voice in relationship, and to be able to have an impact on the flow of the relationship itself (Fishbane, 2001).

The language of the relational self sits comfortably within the framework of the narrative/collaborative therapies - it acknowledges an individual's own experience and history, while highlighting discourses of self that emerge from "relational embeddedness" (Gergen, 1991). Furthermore, this perspective is useful in thinking about young adults and how they negotiate autonomy and power in intimate relationships.

### ***3.1.3. Positioning of the therapist***

#### **3.1.3.1. Socio-political Activist**

While both narrative and collaborative therapies share numerous similarities, they differ in their views of appropriate therapist positioning (Monk & Gehart, 2003). Monk and Gehart (2003) propose that the function and position of the narrative therapist is one of "socio-political activist". Narrative therapists consider problems through a political lens, and are concerned with how stories carry discourses, supporting certain voices and silencing others (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative therapists thus focus on problem stories that dominate and subjugate at both social and personal levels. Dominant cultural ideas embedded in stories become the norms that determine what society values and devalues and inform the stories individuals tell about themselves (Monk & Gehart, 2003). Therefore, narrative therapists actively deconstruct or unpack the cultural assumptions that contextualise client problems in order to demonstrate the effects of oppressive social practices on their clients (Monk & Gehart, 2003; White & Epston, 1990).

#### **3.1.3.2. Conversational Partner**

Monk and Gehart (2003) use Anderson's (1997) description of collaborative therapists as "conversational partners" to describe the collaborative therapist's positioning. From a 'conversational partner' perspective, the emphasis is on issues being linguistically constructed in the here and now, with less emphasis or relevance placed upon history, tradition, and culture not directly featured in the therapeutic conversation. Collaborative therapists focus on meaning construction in the local dialogic encounter rather than drawing out the effects of dominant societal narratives. Their emphasis is on constructing meaning between individuals in local conversations. The focus is therefore on transforming meaning in the local therapeutic dialogue with less systematic attention to the wider sociopolitical climate (Monk & Gehart, 2003).

However, collaborative therapists do not altogether neglect broader social discourses highlighted in narrative therapy. Dominant discourses are viewed as a thread in local dialogue that may or may not have a significant impact on a particular individual's experience. The construction of meaning is understood as an ongoing dialectic between societal and local understandings where societal understandings always have a unique local interpretation, which is in turn reshaped by broader discourse (Monk & Gehart, 2003). Only when issues emerge as significant in the therapeutic dialogue for one of the participants (which may be the therapist), the therapist explores how the implicit and explicit dialogues (between the client, his/her friends, family, social network, community, and the media, etc.) have defined and shaped their interpretation of the problem/issue. The therapeutic dialogue thus creates another opportunity to reshape the client's understanding of their situation. In summary, the collaborative therapist's focus is on encouraging multiplicity of possibilities, rather than on countering oppressive practices (Monk & Gehart, 2003).

#### ***3.1.4. My position as researcher in this study***

During the unstructured research interviews in this study I generally preferred to adopt a curious and respectful 'not-knowing' stance, and to position myself as a 'conversational partner'. My focus was on facilitating a dialogic process that invited participants to talk and tell about their experiences and knowledges of IPV. This required me to remain attuned to what participants wanted to construct in the here-and-now of the interview interaction. I did not want the interview dialogue to be significantly structured and sequenced by the content and timing of my questions or comments, and any response or input from me ideally evolved naturally from the immediate context and dialogue. My intended stance - the success and impact of which I will consider in my analysis - was not to direct or analyse, but to attempt to understand from the perspective of the participant's life experience and their here-and-now telling.

Of course, my professional knowledge(s) of IPV certainly influenced the co-construction of the interview dialogue. For instance, when my own internal dialogue became focused on a particular thought or observation that the participant did not raise, I tentatively offered the observation as part of the conversation. Similarly, when obvious dominant discourses emerged as significant in the interview dialogue, (either for the participant or for myself as researcher), I did shift my position and became more

active in unpacking and addressing the power and influence of such discourses. I was possibly more intent on identifying oppressive problem discourses and their effects with those participants who had personal experiences with violence in their intimate relationships, and my questions and language would at those times have revealed my alternative construction of an issue. Thus, my stance as researcher (conversational partner, and at times more active and socio-political) played a constitutive role in the production of the interview dialogues. Given this, I had to be cautious not to become too intent on pursuing a storyline that I deemed “preferred”, while at the same time being sensitive not to collude with culturally oppressive discourses (Monk & Gehart, 2003).

### ***3.1.5. A relational turn in qualitative research***

My positioning as researcher in this study aligns itself with the relational turn in post-modern and non-traditional qualitative research, where the relation between the researcher and the participant is viewed as a central epistemological issue.

Gunzenhauser (2006) argues that the quality of qualitative research reflects the quality of relation developed between the researcher and researched as two ‘knowing subjects’. Furthermore, in thinking about the desired relation between the researcher and the participant, it is helpful to consider what kind of knowledge we expect to produce through this relation (Gunzenhauser, 2006).

In my study I support this construction of the researcher-researched relation as a particular kind of relation - not as a relation between a knower and known, but as a relation between two ‘knowing subjects’ (Smith & Deemer, 2003, cited in Gunzenhauser, 2006). I thus expect to produce knowledge that is ‘co-constructed’ and ‘created’, rather than ‘discovered’ or ‘emerging’. From this perspective then, as qualitative researchers, we have to pay particular close attention to the role that we play as ‘knowing subjects’ who construct meaning. Thus, the quality and ethicality of a narrative research study require researchers to be accountable for their positions as ‘knowing subjects’, and to attend to issues of reflexivity and representation in their research doings and writings.

### ***3.1.6. Working with young people***

Biklen (2004) argues that young people occupy a less powerful position in relation to adults who have status as former youths. Furthermore, the lack of access young people have to represent their perspectives in the public realm, and the amount of time they spend in institutional settings under the control of adults, all mark their place in the hierarchy (Biklen, 2004). The need to listen carefully, or to find a way to take seriously the words of youth, therefore becomes an important issue, and this depends on both methodological and theoretical issues.

Researchers can claim an interpretive authority through their particular understandings of youth and youthful experiences. For example, Biklen (2004) points out how the filter of a traditional developmental approach can frame adolescents as “acting their age” - where we make them prisoners of their ‘mode of thought’ or identity. For instance, youth are often confined to ‘hormones’, immaturity, or lack of experience, and it is this social construction of them as confined that places them lower on the hierarchy (Biklen, 2004).

In his book, ‘The end of adolescence’, Philip Graham (2004) takes a critical look at how western society thinks about and treats those in their teen years, often infantilising and disempowering them. He argues that adult society often fails to take into account the competence of young people and refuses to allow them to use their skills. In my research study I confronted this problem of hierarchy by conceptualising young adults as informants who can tell us about their perspectives of a particular issue, and who can adequately describe their situations and experiences. I constructed young people as knowledgeable about their lives, able to understand social meanings and able to communicate with thoughtful and reflective competence about their lives. As encouraged by Biklen (2004), I consciously guarded against defining the perspectives of my research participants in relation to an adult sense of “what is happening”, and tried to pay attention to the participants’ legitimacy, expertise and authority as interpreters of their own experience. My stance was that young people are able to be articulate about their lives.



### **3.1.7. Conclusion**

In this section I have outlined how the epistemological premises and practices of narrative and collaborative therapies, and the relational turn in qualitative research, have informed my study's framework and my positioning as researcher.

In the next section I further elaborate on my thesis framework by addressing the methodology of my particular qualitative research approach. This stance directly informed my choices regarding the methods of narrative data collection and analysis.

## **3.2. Methodology of post-modern qualitative research**

In this section I consider important methodological values and assumptions inherent in the knowledge-claims I make in this study. These aspects are all in line with post-modern qualitative research, and include an emphasis on: the interactive context in which data is produced; the representation of the researcher in a qualitative study; a social-constructionist understanding of validity; positional and textual reflexivity; and analysing the constitutive reflexivities of the research interview itself.

### **3.2.1. Talk-in-interaction**

Frith and Kitzinger (1998) raise important methodological questions about the underpinnings of qualitative data analysis. They ask that analysts think more carefully about the assumptions incorporated into the claims they make about the meaning of what participants say. In particular, the authors emphasise the analytical importance of recognising the interactive context in which data is produced.

Many qualitative researchers tend to treat what people 'say' as offering more or less accurate depictions of their behaviour. Self-report data is then treated as offering a 'transparent' window through which the behaviour 'behind the talk' can be (more or less adequately) assessed. However, the argument is made that participants in interviews or focus group discussions are doing much more than faithfully telling their stories or simply reporting on their own behaviour; they are also attending to the expectations and responses of those with whom they are talking, managing their identities, and justifying, excusing, and otherwise accounting for their behaviour in socially plausible ways.

Therefore, when participants talk to other people about a particular experience, it is appropriate to ask what such talk is doing in the context in which it is actually produced (i.e. what is the function of the narrative/talk) (Frith et al., 1998). As researchers we must thus explore the ways in which reports are interactively managed and discursively negotiated to serve the interests of participants. This kind of exploration fits in well in the arenas of narrative, discourse and conversation analysis where the importance of talk-in-interaction is emphasised; it also enables us to conceptually relocate our “text” as something that is done in dialogue rather than as monologic representation of phenomena (Korth, 2002).

For example, Frith and Kitzinger (1998) explored how young women talk about sexual negotiation. They present an alternative analysis that treats the data not as transparent evidence in support of a particular theory, but rather as a resource used by young women to account for their experiences, construct their identities, and manage their reputations. The interesting question here is not what ‘really’ happens, but rather, how young women in interaction with other women talk about their own and their male partners’ emotions, and what functions this talk serves in their collaborative constructions of what heterosexual relationships are like. This type of analysis offers the opportunity of exploring what might be at stake for women in talking about themselves in a particular way.

It is difficult to apply a talk-in-interaction analysis to the data presented by other researchers, because as readers we are usually only presented with brief decontextualised snippets, which rarely include, for example, the questions to which the participants are responding, the reactions of the interviewer or other members of the focus groups, or the development of participants’ versions over consecutive turns or over time. It is sometimes quite evident that these data snippets were produced in collaboration with interviewers, who have then erased their own contributions or influences. The effects of such erasures is to obscure the crucial point that the way people talk about their experiences depends on who they are talking to, what shared knowledges can be assumed, and what kinds of reactions they anticipate (Frith et al., 1998).

In addition, in many qualitative studies extracts from self-report data are often used as evidence for the claims of the researcher, however, the methodology of the data analysis

is rarely explicitly outlined and discussed. Frith and Kitzinger (1998) comment critically on the passing reference that is usually made to ‘themes’ that ‘emerged’ from the data, sometimes with the help of a computer program, and suggest that data extracts are often presented badly and with little discussion, as though their ‘meanings’ are self-evident (Frith et al., 1998). They furthermore point out that a data extract is usually presented as an example of how a participant ‘experiences’ an issue, rather than how he/she describes it. The brevity of the analysis reflects the expectation that the reader will ‘see’ the data for what it is - without needing detailed explanation or deconstruction, i.e. there is no need to un-pick the data. Moreover, often the ‘self-evident’ meaning of what a participant says is essentially the same as the researchers’ analysis of it. So, the participant presents (in ‘ordinary’ language) precisely what the analyst presents (in more elaborate language) as worked-up sociological theory (Frith et al., 1998).

In my study the interactional context of the interview is a crucial feature of talk that is key to my analysis. I am interested in the concerns and intentions of research participants in talking in particular ways about their experiences. I base this on the assumption that rather than relating their experiences in earnest, neutral and disinterested ways, participants have specific investments in how their talk achieves certain self-presentation and interactional goals. I thus consider how participants construct and negotiate their accounts in an interactive way, and in a particular research context.

### ***3.2.2. Representation of the researcher in qualitative inquiry***

Given the above argument that some qualitative researchers decontextualise talk (data) from the interaction in which it takes place, it follows that these researchers may subsequently fail to address the issue of ‘who’ is represented in the final text.

Researchers adhering to objective scientific approaches traditionally silence and bypass the issue of their representation within their research texts. This is often done through the use of certain linguistic mechanisms, such as writing in the third person or in the passive voice, or by eliminating and bracketing the researcher from the represented features of the study (Mantzoukas, 2004). This intentional exclusion of the representation of the researcher, although superficial, nonetheless is accepted as valid

research, where the end texts are presented as objective, value-free, and accurate representations of the participants. Although this kind of research inquiry is predominantly quantitative in design, the qualitative inquiries up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also had a predominantly objective focus. For instance, Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory based on reproducing reality in a generalised theory for prediction and control through rigorous criteria of verification. From this perspective, issues of representation also need not be negotiated or debated in the research text (Mantzoukas, 2004).

In contrast, qualitative research emerging from post-modern frameworks reject notions of rational objectivity implied in the separation of researcher and researched, and instead emphasise reflexivity and the positioning of the researcher in the research process (Mantzoukas, 2004; Fawcett & Hearn, 2004).

Mantzoukas (2004) argues that the representation of the researcher in qualitative inquiries is inevitable, and the exclusion, or not, of the researcher from the text is a mere conventional agreement based on the consensus of a particular research model. There is not a single, rigid, and strict uniformity of qualitative inquiry; different approaches have different rules, values, convictions, and vocabularies, and these permit the individual to explain and justify his or her thinking and actions in a valid manner (Mantzoukas, 2004).

In summary, the 'who' and 'what' represented within the end product of a qualitative inquiry has a direct correlation with the epistemological and ontological assumptions and values of the researcher (Mantzoukas, 2004). Ontology and epistemology refers to the researcher's beliefs in the form and the nature of reality, truth, and knowledge. Therefore, the way in which the researcher conceptualises the means and production of knowledge and the relationship that exists between the researcher and the participant regulates to a great degree what eventually is represented by the research text (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). In following the relational turn in qualitative inquiry, and positioning myself as a 'knowing' subject and conversational partner who has a constitutive role in the interactive-talk of the interview, it is important that I make myself as researcher visible in my research representations.

### 3.2.3. *A social-constructionist understanding of 'validity'*

Within qualitative methodology, rationally 'objective' researchers put forth, for example, triangulation of data sources, data analysts, and theory as a method of reducing 'systematic bias', thereby increasing the validity of the findings from a qualitative study. Aguinaldo (2004) theorises the issue of validity from a social constructionist perspective, particularly as it is applied to the assessment of qualitative research. His theory is premised on the social constructionist belief that research findings are always already partial and situated; that they actively construct the social world which is itself an interpretation and in need of interpretation.

Aguinaldo (2004) suggests that we change the validity question from "Is this valid research?" to "What is this research valid for?" This reformulation does not view validity as a determination (i.e. "is valid" versus "is not valid"), but rather as a process of interrogation. This interrogation allows for multiple and sometimes contradictory readings of research representations. In this way, the process of validation is arguably "democratised" by the proliferation of readings emerging from researchers, participants, and readers.

Some qualitative researchers further refer to the transferability of a research text - whereby the reader, through critical reading and decision-making, generates alternative explanations, raises new possibilities, stimulates dialogue, and opens new questions to produce new insights (Mantzoukas, 2004; Angen, 2000). However, not all qualitative researchers provide enough information to make alternative readings possible.

Within this reformulation of validity, Aguinaldo (2004) conceptualises research findings as representations that should be scrutinised for their realist, critical, deconstructive and reflexive narrative functions. These research representations or narratives are premised upon particular ontological and epistemological claims.

*A realist narrative* functions to tell us 'what is' and therefore 'what we should do' and assumes an objective world. Research findings can function as a realist narrative that other people can use to evaluate and assess their own experiences of a similar issue;

A *critical narrative* foregrounds political structures that shape the social world within uneven social relations. The experiences reflected in research findings occur within a broader context, and this has a direct impact on the experiences narrated. By drawing attention to these political structures, the narratives function as a critical account, and can give a glimpse of social structures that shape the participants' experiences.

A *deconstructive narrative* emphasises the social construction of narratives, works against the production of foreclosures, and encourages proliferation of possibilities. The interest here is to see how things are constructed by participants. (The position of the interviewer as 'conversational partner' will facilitate these narratives).

A *reflexive narrative* makes known the constitutive role of the researcher and the processes through which his/her reading is selected from an infinite number of possible readings. The narratives are also seen as situated within the larger project of the researcher's study. Being confined within the writing conventions of the discipline of psychology (i.e. the familiar 'literature review', 'method', 'research results' and 'discussion' sections), might work against one's own reflexivity. Researchers can nonetheless make their presence known through the form of an active research voice within the thesis. In this thesis I have decided to write in the first person in order to foreground my performance (and hence accountability) as the researcher. Furthermore, my choice of methods for data collection and analysis (i.e. unstructured interactive interviews and narrative-discursive analysis) were aimed at eliciting research findings that represent deconstructive and reflexive narratives. These research methods and representations are firmly grounded in the epistemological background (social constructionism) and methodological framework (non-traditional qualitative research) of my study.

#### **3.2.4. Reflexivity**

The ability to more explicitly position and represent themselves in their research write-ups, demands a certain degree of reflexivity from researchers. Reflexivity has become a signal topic in contemporary discussions of qualitative research (Nunkeosing, 2005; Mantzoukas, 2004; Davies et al., 2004; Macbeth, 2001).

#### **3.2.4.1. Positional reflexivity**

It is argued that positional reflexivity is crucial if researchers are to address the influence of their own constructions and hence, their own practices of power (Aguinaldo, 2004). As researchers we are engaged in constituting ourselves as particular kinds of people - we do this through what it is we make describable and the discourses through which we come to see what it is that we want to make relevant and salient (Davies et al., 2004). Positional reflexivity can thus be described as “seeing what frames our seeing” (Lather, 1993), or seeing what informs our subjective perception (Henne, 2007) or “angles of vision” (Peshkin, 2001).

Some researchers further argue that it’s important to keep the researcher firmly in the social and political world (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004; May, 1998). Aside from a sustaining focus on the self-reflexivity of the researcher as author, one also needs an awareness of the social location of the author, participant and the topic, and the understanding of political agendas and commitment to political emancipation (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004).

In my study, my objective is to provide a metanarrative in my analysis - where the reader can identify my authorial voice remarking on and considering the research project itself, taking measure of my own epistemological and methodological positions, my relationships with the participants, the social and political location of the topic, and otherwise reflecting and reporting on the research work and process.

#### **3.2.4.2. Textual reflexivity**

Textual reflexivity leads the researcher to directly examine and address the very exercise of textual/writing representations, and to reflexively monitor the text in its production (Macbeth, 2001). Reflexive texts allow for multiple layers of meaning and interpretation, and do not offer descriptions that claim to give complete, self-contained, representations of reality (Macbeth, 2001; Lather & Smithies, 1997). Good reflexive work can be found in what Denzin (1997) calls “messy texts”: these are texts that are aware of their own narrative apparatuses, that are sensitive to how reality is socially constructed, that consider the multiple discourses that can occur in a given social space, and that understand that writing is a way of ‘framing’ reality. Reflexivity thus addresses the problematics of “certainty” that have followed on the dissolution of modernist programs and confidences, and brings a more unsettled field into view (Macbeth, 2001).

### **3.2.4.3. The constitutive reflexivities of the research interview**

Macbeth (2001) compares positional and textual reflexivity to a third and earlier discourse of Ethnomethodology (EM). Rather than a reflexivity of professional self-reflection, textual deconstruction, or methodological procedure, reflexivity in an ethnomethodological mode is seen as an inexhaustible practice in the organisation of everyday life, and very near the heart of the socially constructive exercise. Here reflexivity points to the organisation of ordinary sense and meaning - how order, fact and meaning in everyday life are produced as practical objectivities.

Similar to Macbeth's exhibit (2001) of an interaction between students and a teacher, one can think of the individual research interview as a social-constructive exercise, with an identifying order and occasion-relevant identities. As interviewers, we analyse and interpret what participants make of our questions and reflexively reveal our analyses in our next questions and remarks. In this sense, our questions are themselves reflexively tied to the production of the discourse in the room. As we jointly produce and implicate one another in our understandings of the occasion, and in the developing detail and interactional dynamics of our ongoing dialogue, we reflexively assemble the order and structure of the interview event. Therefore, as interviewer and interviewee, we are the first reflexive analysts on the scene (Macbeth, 2001).

For my analysis, I have found these multiple interpretations and applications of 'reflexivity' very useful. Aside from reflecting on my position as researcher, and my practices of textual representation, I also reflect on how meaning and structure are achieved in the situated interaction of the research interview. This approach ties in well with the talk-in-interaction framework of my study.

### **3.3. Theory and methods of data creation: unstructured interactive interviews**

Given that narrative research typically has a double nature, with an inevitable overlap of theory and method, a discussion of my methods of data creation (i.e. unstructured interactive interviews), follows naturally from the above discussion of the methodology informing it. In this section I address the following issues (that again incorporate both theory and method): research interviews as a way of knowing; the nature of the unstructured interactive interview; the dynamic of power in interviews; the issues of risks, reciprocity and consent; and the process of the interview itself.



However, I start off this section by first giving a description of the sample of participants in my study and the procedures I followed to solicit them.

### ***3.3.1. Research participants***

Young adults who were students at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa, participated in this study. There were a total of 24 participants (19 female; 5 male). Of the participants 15 women and 5 men participated in individual unstructured interviews, and 5 women participated in a focus group (one of these women also participated in an individual interview). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 24 years, with a mean age of 20.7 years.

Due to the ongoing nature of intimate partner violence (i.e. it is not likely to be a single, isolated event), it was expected that the stories of some of the university students would relate back to, or include, their experiences and understandings of relationships in their adolescent years. These retrospective stories could elucidate how young adults have processed and made sense of their relationships and experiences over a period of time.

Demographically, the participants were a relatively diverse sample of young adults, with all the racial subgroups represented, and with socio-economic variations within subgroups. Of the 19 female participants, 10 were White, 3 Coloured, 3 African and 3 Indian. Of the 5 male participants, 3 were White and 2 African. Given the context of the study – that it took place at a South African multi-racial university – it is noteworthy that fewer Coloured and African students, as opposed to White students, chose to participate. Aside from White students possibly identifying more readily with me – a White researcher - it is likely that certain cultural beliefs, attitudes and practices made it difficult for some young people to talk openly about their experiences of IPV.

### ***3.3.2. Procedures***

In August 2005 I made announcements in various undergraduate academic classes at UCT in an attempt to solicit volunteer participants for my study. My being a lecturer and clinical psychologist in the UCT Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at the time facilitated my access into these academic classes. My study had also received full

ethics approval from the UCT Faculty of Health Research Ethics Committee, and a research grant from the Medical Research Council (MRC) of South Africa.

With the aim of capturing a diverse sample of students, I made announcements in classes across different faculties; these included: departments in the Faculties of Humanities, Health Sciences; Health and Rehabilitation Sciences; and Engineering. At the start of each lecture I made a brief announcement introducing myself, and the nature and objectives of my study. I explained that the study was aimed at better understanding how young people view, experience and talk about intimate/romantic relationships. This aim was contextualised by the following statement: “Previous research, both in South Africa and across the world, has shown that some young women and men might be experiencing some form of harm in their relationships. More needs to be known about what young people know - and how they feel and talk - about intimate relationships and intimate partner violence, in order to find better ways of helping those who experience harm from their current or previous intimate partners”.

Female and male students were invited to participate in an individual interview and/or a focus group discussion. It was explained that students did not necessarily have to have had personal experiences of IPV in order to be a participant. This decision to include participants who had not personally experienced IPV was consistent with the premise that understandings regarding IPV stem from a range of sources and experiences.

Furthermore, I felt that this sampling approach would allow me to situate young adults’ accounts of their own experiences of partner violence in the context of young adults’ accounts of the nature of intimate relationships and conflicts regardless of the presence of violence. Similarly, it would access young adults’ interpretations of and exposure to partner violence regardless of their personal experiences of IPV. It was also possible that participants would talk about less serious forms of partner violence not likely to be reported or intervened upon. Moreover, inclusion of both young women and young men provided an opportunity to examine the nature of partner violence and the possible role gender plays in shaping it.

A two-page handout (APPENDIX C) summarising the nature and aim of the study was distributed to all the students. The second page of the handout directed students to indicate whether they wanted to participate in the study, and if so, whether they preferred to take part in the individual interview, group discussion or both. Students who were keen to participate were requested to write down their name and contact

details. It was explained that the interviews and group discussions would take place at an arranged time that did not interfere with their academic duties, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured. My name and contact details were provided and students were encouraged to contact me if they had any questions. Students were requested to separate the second-page of the handout which I then personally collected before leaving the lecture room.

I consequently contacted every volunteer participant telephonically and arranged a time for the individual interview or focus group meeting. At the start of every individual interview/focus group, participants were given an informed consent form (APPENDIX D) to read and sign. This form underscored various important issues, which I verbally addressed with all participants, including: the study's aim; the procedures (the length of the interview/group; the use of a tape-recorder); the option of withdrawing participation at any time; the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity; and the discussion of action and counselling options at the end of participation. All focus groups and interviews were conducted by myself and in English. Interviews and focus groups usually lasted one and a half hours. Given that they attended an English-medium academic institution, all the participants felt comfortable to converse in this language.

Given that there were only enough respondents to conduct one female focus group, the rest of this section looks more closely at the research interview as my primary method of creating data, and considers the nature and process of the unstructured interactive interview in particular - which is the interview style I chose to adopt in this study.

### ***3.3.3. Research interviews as a way of knowing***

The interview is the most widely used method of generating data in qualitative social research. Interviews deal with thinking and talk that are later transformed into texts. This method of data collection focuses on the actual interview process and the role of the interviewer. Due to the importance of - and preoccupation with - interviewing, there is a search for better understanding of interviews as a way of knowing in social and health research, and the continued search for more effective ways to conduct interviews (Nunkoosing, 2005).

In narrative research the unmistakable complexity and dominant influence of the interview task is revealed. The interview requires linguistic transactions and relationships between the interviewer and interviewee. Nunkoosing (2005) suggests that the skilled, embodied interviewer uses his or her person to communicate with people to create stories. It's in the use of the self, of relationship building, of acute awareness of the interaction and flow of conversations, of a sensitive awareness of the interviewer's theoretical and professional position, and of his/her research question that qualitative data of high quality are constructed in the interview.

As narrative interviewers we do not just collect data, rather, we collaborate with interviewees to create and construct stories and versions of events that can have the possibility of generating useful and meaningful information and understanding (Smyth & Hattam, 2001). This dialogic process produces an output informed by the mixed voices and influences of the interviewer and participant (Rhodes, 2000). From this perspective, personal narratives are not unproblematic and clear representations of the unique experience of an individual, but are situated and context-dependent performance practices that textualise experience.

Hence, the constructions of the researcher and interviewee can be seen as "artful improvisations" (Nunkoosing, 2005; Bourdieu, 1977) where the spontaneous and creative process of the interview interaction invites both researcher and interviewee to construct meaning and knowledge with words (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). The 'data' in narrative interviews is quite literally being created, rather than collected. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) perceive both the interviewer and interviewee as necessarily and unavoidably "active" in the meaning-making process of the interview, and constructing a version of reality through their interaction. The interview is thus a way of creating one of many possible accounts (Rhodes, 2000), and researchers should consider the extent to which their methodological practices allow and support the interviewee to be creative and artful in telling their story. One expects an interviewee to choose aspects of his or her life that he or she is most interested in telling. However, the interviewer too might be more interested in some stories than the one being told. Nunkoosing (2005) warns that there are times when the researcher's search for interesting, revealing stories can lead him or her to engage in activities that are potentially exploitative (for instance, the interview can become an interrogation).

Another possible scenario could see the interviewee having a familiar and well-rehearsed story to tell since it's the only one that he or she has access to at the moment. This can either be a form of resistance to protect his or her ego, or it can be a deliberate act against the intrusive style or pace of interviewing of the researcher (Nunokoosing, 2005). In these instances, there are always new stories to be told. The interviewer must not hurry the interview, and must be patient and respectful in supporting the interviewee in finding new things to reveal and new ways to think and talk about their situation and experience. The interviewer thus uses his or her skills to enable the interviewee to tell stories that would otherwise remain untold or inaccessible.

In summary, the interview interaction becomes an ontologically formative process by which the researcher and interviewee can, in communication with one another, inform one another's being (Nunokoosing, 2005; Shotter, 1989). The interviewer and interviewee are thus both changed by the dialogue of the interview; and each new interview has something in common with, but is also different from, the previous interview.

### ***3.3.4. The nature of unstructured interactive interviews***

Narrative research practices provide a space for less dominating and more relational modes of interviewing (Riessman, 2001). I chose the method of 'unstructured interactive interviews' as a way creating data in my study: I was curious about what and how young adults will narrate around their experiences and knowledges of relationships and IPV. This methodological stance also applied to the one focus group I conducted.

As discussed previously, I view interviews as conversations in which both participants - teller and interviewer - develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both (Riessman, 1993). Rather than attempting to contain lengthy accounts and thereby control meaning, I attempted to respect participants' ways of organising meaning in their lives. As narrative interviewer, my focus was on facilitating narrative telling in interviews. I thus made an effort to give up power and to follow participants down their "associative trails" (Riessman, 2001). My preference was for less structure, in the interest of giving respondents greater control over the process and content of the interview. What to talk about, and how to talk about it, was initially and primarily left up to the participant(s). During the

interviews I asked questions that would open up topics and allow respondents to construct answers, in collaboration with me the listener, in the ways they found meaningful. This method also felt sensitive to exploring the issue of intimate relationships in an unobtrusive, respectful and non-judgemental way.

As encouraged by Smyth and Hattam (2001) who explored ‘dropping out’ of school experiences of young people, I attempted to open up spaces for participants to tell their accounts, even if those accounts appeared to be non-linear, partial, fragmentary, and possibly told for the first time to another human being. I started each interview with one or two “grand tour question(s)” (Corbin & Morse, 2003): Why were you interested in taking part in this research interview about relationships and intimate partner violence? What would you like to talk about? As such, participants were influential in determining where to begin their narrative, what topics to include or exclude, the order in which topics were introduced, the amount of detail, the scope and emotional intensity of the interview, and the pacing of the interview.

I shared Smyth and Hattam’s opinion (2001) that research questions would emerge out of purposeful conversations rather than too formal interviews. Hence, my challenge was not to over-determine my research questions at the start of the research process, because in any research there should be something to be discovered or created. This required me to move away from rigid categories and tightly pre-formulated questions, and to open up creative practices.

### ***3.3.5. Research interviews and the dynamic of power***

One must consider and reflect on the issue of power, and how it is discursively constructed between participants in an interview. Limerick and colleagues (1996) see power as a paradoxical phenomenon, where each of the participants is dominant, trying to steer the interview, but at the same time each is also submissive, being steered by the other. From this perspective, every interview, especially one that touches on sensitive issues, involves a power struggle between interviewer and interviewee rather than, or alongside, cooperation.

The interview therefore involves a transactional dynamic where the exercise of power is a characteristic of both the interviewer and interviewee, and where power constantly

shifts back and forth in the course of the interview. The power of the interviewer rests in his or her authority as a seeker of knowledge and methodological expertise, and that of the interviewee as a more or less privileged knower (Nunokoosing, 2005). The interviewer-researcher can at best seek reciprocity, even though he or she ultimately reconstructs the text of the transcript from the talk of the interview, and presents his/her analysis and interpretations to the community of researchers. Nunokoosing (2005) reminds us that, as researchers, we are also in a power relationship with our research community: we write for other practitioners, academics and fellow researchers, as well as supervisors and thesis assessors, and thus the intellectual rigour and validity of our interpretations have to meet with the requirements of the research community rather than with the agreement and expectations of the people we interview. Furthermore, as researchers we belong to other identity-defining professional tribes, such as psychologist, anthropologist, nurse, policy analyst, teacher, sociologist, and so on. Each profession makes claims to ways of knowing that inform our research theories and practices, and that provide filters for listening to the interviews (Nunokoosing, 2005).

### ***3.3.6. Risks and reciprocity***

Unstructured interactive interviews are shared experiences in which researchers and interviewees come together to create a context of conversational intimacy in which participants feel comfortable to tell their story. An interview is a reciprocal exchange: participants sometimes share intimate information, and the researcher in return gives a sense of presence or of being with the participant in the story (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

The essence of trust and conversational intimacy associated with unstructured interviews can create both potential threats and at the same time make them potentially therapeutic as well as essential data creation tools. Corbin and Morse (2003) contend that the interviewing process and the control given to participants, especially in unstructured interactive types, allow for the management of many of the so-called risks associated with doing interviews. Essential to preventing participant distress is the researcher's interviewing skills and a code of ethics. They make the argument that when research is conducted with sensitivity and guided by ethics it becomes a process of benefits to both participants and researchers.

Dealing with a sensitive topic, I did consider that strong emotions might be aroused by my research, and thus I started the research interviews with certain mechanisms in

place: I was prepared to terminate an interview should a participant become distressed; if necessary, I undertook to remain with a participant until he/she felt emotionally contained to end the interview-process; I made appropriate arrangements with participants who expressed a desire for post-interview counselling or support; and I made provisions to call participants several days after the interview to determine if there was any lingering distress.

Corbin (2003) suggests that participants, in agreeing to participate in a study, usually do so because they want something in return, even though they themselves may not be aware what this is. Usually there is no overt or spoken contract between participant and researcher about what the exchange will be (Corbin & Morse, 2003). However, I tried to discern what it is participants were seeking, then if possible provided that during the interview or once it was over.

### ***3.3.7. The issue of consent***

For ethical reasons, we seek people's consent before they are interviewed. It is important to note that the person consents only to take part in the interview/focus group itself. This can be problematic with unstructured interactive interviews and groups where the dynamic nature of these interactions makes it impossible to predict with certainty what will transpire. During these interviews and groups the stories narrated are constructed in the moment to the extent that neither the interviewer nor interviewees can predict what course the interview/group might take, or the details of what is going to be discussed in advance of the event (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2002). Qualitative research is an unfolding and emerging process, therefore participants cannot be fully informed about all the potential consequences of the research or even all the particulars that will be covered (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

Prior to participation, I explained the unstructured and dynamic nature of qualitative interviews to my participants, and clarified their perceptions and expectations of the nature and process of such an interaction. I clarified that participants were consenting, not to answering particular questions, but to participating in a conversational-style dialogue that would unfold in unknown ways, and that held multiple possibilities.

### ***3.3.8. The process of the interview***



The process of the unstructured interactive interviews in my study resembled the 4-phase process description given by Corbin and Morse (2003), as well as aspects of the narrative-conversation-guiding method described by Rosenthal (2003).

The *pre-interview phase*: I began every interview by explaining the purpose of it and the research project in general. I repeated and briefly elaborated on the material I presented when announcing the research project to university student classrooms. Each point on the consent form was then reviewed, and I confirmed whether the participant(s) fully understood what being a research participant entailed. Once I was confident that any concerns or questions about confidentiality, anonymity, and so on were addressed, I asked the participant(s) to sign the consent form, and gained permission to tape-record the session. During this phase, there was often small talk, during which the participant(s) and myself had an opportunity to assess each other and begin to establish a degree of comfort, trust and reciprocity. This initial period is very important and should not be hurried for it sets the tone for the forthcoming interview (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

The *tentative phase*: The pre-interview phase gradually gives way to the interview itself. I was sensitive to the fact that participants might start off by testing my responses as they wonder what and how much to talk about. As they construct their story, participants take into account their own emotional responses to what is being revealed as well as the verbal and non-verbal responses of the interviewer (and other participants in the group) and adjust their storytelling accordingly. As trust builds, gradually more of the story unfolds, exposing the self to varying degrees, and thereby moving the narration into the next phase (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

The *immersion phase*: In this phase the participants and the interviewer become deeply caught up in the unfolding drama and emotion of their story as they try to make sense of significant events in their lives. My focus during the first phase of the individual interview was on allowing the participant to tell the story they came to tell: to reveal to memory what they were keen and willing to talk about, and how they wanted to talk about it. Their storytelling was supported through active listening on my part, i.e. I probed and asked questions to get more detail and to clarify. In the focus groups, I allowed other group members to guide conversation via their listening, probes, questions and responses.

During the second phase of the interviews I asked more “internal narrative questions” (Rosenthal, 2003) regarding that which had already been discussed. During the third phase of the interview I oriented myself according to my own researcher objectives/curiosities, and posed more “external narrative questions” regarding topics that I was curious about and had not yet been mentioned.

*Phase of emergence:* During this phase the interviews shifted to a less emotional level, and often involved me providing information, advice, feedback or validation. I considered this an exchange of information honouring the reciprocal relationship between me as researcher and the interviewee. However, I tried not to interrupt the narrative discourse but waited until the storytelling came to a natural ending. I often rounded off conversations by having the interviewee tell me about secure phases and areas in their life.

During this phase participants also had an opportunity to give feedback on their experience of the interview-process. Many started giving feedback before I directly asked for it. Similarly, in the focus groups, participants gave each other feedback, advice and validation, and shared their experiences of the group experience as a whole. Participants in my study echoed many of the benefits mentioned by Corbin and Morse (2003), such as: the interview dialogue acknowledged and validated their feelings; it contributed to a sense of agency and purpose; it offered an opportunity for introspection and self-awareness; it granted a sense of empowerment; and, it enabled participants to voice a story often for the first time. Group participants also seemed to derive a sense of solidarity and collectivity as they realised that they were not alone in their feelings or experiences. Furthermore, being in an academic environment, many of the participants considered their participation in research as a valued academic practice, and an opportunity to contribute to the development of professional knowledge. They respected and valued the role and legitimacy of research, and many mentioned their interest in initiating their own research projects in the future.

### **3.4. Theory and methods of narrative analysis**

In this section I address the methodological thinking substantiating my decision to conduct a narrative analysis. Again, the interconnectedness between theory and method is evident in the discussion of the following: studying narratives; locating the narratives for my analysis; transcription and process of analysis; and trustworthiness of analysis. I then proceed to describe my analytical research framework which uses an interactional, performative and narrative-discursive approach.

### ***3.4.1. Studying narratives***

A primary way individuals make sense of experience is by casting it in narrative form. Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives (Riessman, 1993). Lawless (2001) argues that narrative has purpose, and that to tell our stories is to re-create our selves. As Lawless states (2001, p.106), “the act of telling a story is a creative act, a kind of performance, that takes words and language beyond their mere rhetorical power and enables them to work for the narrator toward transformation and self-representation”. It is as we share our personal stories with others that they take on coherence and meaning and become part of our individual life story. Through reminiscing about our past with others we come to reconstruct and redefine both our experiences and ourselves (Fivush, 2003).

Narratives link our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience, or make meaning of it (Riessman, 1987). It is through narratives that we “translate knowing into telling” (White, 1981, cited in Riessman, 1987). Individuals often make difficult events meaningful by putting them into an interpretive sequence. The story metaphor emphasises that we create order, construct texts in particular contexts.

Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story/narrative itself. The focus is on examining how a narrative is constructed and how a teller rhetorically creates it to make particular points (Riessman, 1993).

“The purpose is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. The methodological approach examines the informant’s story and analyzes how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity. Analysis in narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. We ask, why was the story told *that way*?” (Riessman, 1993, p.2).

Narrative analysis approaches give attention to language and its role in constructing meaning - how people say what they do and who they are, and the narrative structures they employ to construct experience by telling it. Narrative analysis is thus useful in revealing grammatical structures and word choice used by participants, and analyses how participants use language and structure to promote understanding, meaning and interpretation of their experiences. Language is not viewed as a transparent medium, unambiguously reflecting stable and singular meanings; rather, it is understood as deeply constitutive of reality. Informants' stories are not seen as mirroring a world 'out there', but are viewed as constructed (and co-constructed with the interviewer), creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and interpretive (Riessman, 1993). Language has three analytically interdependent functions and all are essential for the interpretation of meaning. The meaning of what someone says is not simply its content (ideational function); how something is said (textual function) in the context of the shifting roles of speaker and listener (interpersonal function) is critical also. Narrative analysis provides methods for examining meaning at all three levels (Riessman, 1993).

Furthermore, given that narrative analysis focuses on the 'how' of lived experience, and not the causal 'why', analysis is framed interactionally and attempts to unravel the multiple meanings that derive from interactional events while simultaneously seeking to examine the social text presented in the personal narrative (Lempert, 1994). The narrative researcher thus attends to how individuals talk about, and construct, their experience, through the use of language in interaction, and how this focus adds to our attempts to understand the experience.

Certainly, narrative research methods have been found to be useful in projects that explore extremely sensitive issues with complex layers of meaning (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004; Chaitin, 2003). Narrative research provides opportunities for expression and can bring into existence perspectives previously excluded, muted, or silenced by dominant structures and discourses. Because of its epistemological commitment to a more democratised research agenda, narrative research is a way of providing a genuine space within which participants are able to reveal what is real for them (Smyth & Hattam, 2001). Narrative inquiry approaches give prominence to human agency and imagination, and are well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity (Riessman, 1993).

Furthermore, studying narratives is additionally useful for what they reveal about social life - culture “speaks itself” through an individual’s story. It is possible to examine certain practices of power that may be taken for granted by individual speakers.

Narrators speak in terms that seem natural, but one can analyse how culturally and historically contingent these terms are (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, cited in Riessman, 1993).

### ***3.4.2. Locating the narratives for my analysis***

Riessman (2001) points out that there is considerable variation in how investigators employ the concept of personal narrative and, relatedly, in methodological assumptions and strategies of analysis. People working in the traditions of social history and anthropology typically use the term ‘narrative’ to refer to the entire life story. In my study, I use the concept of personal narrative in the following two ways.

Firstly, I use it to refer to brief, topically specific stories: these are discrete stories told in response to questions during a once-off interview (usually lasting one and a half to two hours). Secondly, I use the concept of personal narrative to refer to large sections of talk and interview exchanges - where I focus on how the interviewee’s narratives are framed in and through interaction. My focus is on analysing the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of the telling. This approach is distinguished by the following features: presentation of - and reliance on - detailed transcripts of interview extracts (including all interviewer utterances); attention to the structural features of discourse; analysis of the co-production of narratives through the dialogic exchange between interviewer and participant; making primary data available<sup>3</sup>, and a comparative approach to interpreting similarities and differences across participants’ stories (Riessman, 2001).

### ***3.4.3. Transcription and process of analysis***

Taping and transcribing are absolutely essential to narrative analysis. Transforming talk into written text, precisely because it is a representation, involves selection and reduction (Riessman, 1993). The process I followed entailed the following: After conducting the interviews, I either transcribed the full interview myself - or delegated this to an external transcriber (who was guided by me about how precise and inclusive to be – the necessity of including all of the interviewer’s comments was emphasised). I

then spent considerable time personally checking and correcting the full transcriptions of all the interviews before proceeding to the next stage.

In the second level of transcription I proceeded to read and re-read all the interviews, and make summary notes pertaining to each individual interview. These notes attended to three areas of interest: the content (what participants make their talk about), the telling (as interaction and performance) and the structure (the language and organisation used in the telling).

In line with a narrative-discursive framework, I followed the data analysis described by Reynolds, Wetherell and Taylor (2007) – I approached the transcripts of the interviews as a single body of data and searched for patterns within and across interviews. With each individual interview (and the one focus group) I highlighted sections of talk that appeared to illustrate patterns related to content and/or telling process - these patterns were exemplified in the telling of particular speakers, but are interpreted in terms of shared discursive resources and common dilemmas rather than expressions of individual identity (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005).

My criteria for recognising a narrative were similarly broad and did not require talk to be organised around a beginning, middle and end, or contained within entrance and exit talk (Riessman, 1993). I looked for passages that revealed some kind of sequence and consequence that connected events and relationships to another, that linked up with earlier or later references and that were explanatory rather than simply descriptive (Reynolds, Wetherell, & Taylor, 2007).

This task of identifying narrative segments and their representation cannot be delegated. “It is not a technical operation but the stuff of analysis itself, the “unpacking” of structure that is essential to interpretation” (Riessman, 1993, p.58). Within this framework of transcription, one can see that transcription and analysis go hand in hand. “How we arrange and rearrange the [interview] text in light of our discoveries is a process of testing, clarifying and deepening our understanding of what is happening in the discourse” (Mischler, 1991, cited in Riessman, 1993, p.60).

In addition, and in the spirit of narrative analysis, I chose to analyse and present one individual interview in its entirety (APPENDIX B – Interview with Natasha). My purpose was to preserve this narrative as an essential meaning-making structure, and to

illustrate the sequential features that characterise narrative accounts. With this interview I reveal how the respondent, through the course of an interview, constructs meaning, and I analyse how it is accomplished (Riessman, 1993). The analysis furthermore shows how a personal narrative “is unique in its detail and shaped to the context and purpose of its telling, yet employs resources held in common with other speakers” (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005, p.213). For logistical and ethical reasons, I have chosen not to present the rest of my interview data in this manner, and it’s important to note that this full interview in Appendix B will not be included in the final library copies of this thesis. Firstly, I had to limit my thesis to a particular word-count; secondly, and more importantly, I had to consider the ethicality of disseminating and presenting transcripts of complete interviews. Given that they’re students of UCT, these participants will have access to reading my thesis, and it’s likely that some of them will choose to do so. Therefore, there was the risk of having participants recognise themselves or others in the interview transcripts, thereby risking their anonymity and confidentiality.

#### ***3.4.4. An interpretive stance***

In my study I use a detailed “bottom up” (Wooffitt, 2005) approach, where the objective of the analysis is to “describe the organisation of actual language practices, unencumbered in the first instance by theoretically derived characteristics of their import or nature” (p.154, cited in Taylor & Littleton, 2006). As with ethnographic approaches, the purpose is to make the familiar strange: here a process of sorting and sifting aims to uncover features of the data which were not necessarily apparent on an initial reading. These may then be related to the theoretical ideas and arguments of other writers; however, the analysis is initially data-driven and involves examining the details of talk rather than the overall story of what the speaker is saying (Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

The findings from my research analysis are an interpretation based on my immersion in the larger body of material as data, and the search for patterns and discursive resources across it. This involves a systematic process of rigorous reading, re-reading and sorting to ensure that all the transcribed material is considered. The data extracts presented in my research texts are therefore illustrative of these larger patterns rather than a presentation of all the data analysed. However, any pattern is also considered within the

unique context of a particular occasion of talk, for the work it does there (Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

Following from the discipline of psychology, the narrative-discursive approach retains an emphasis on detailed analytic procedures. However, it takes an interpretive stance and does not claim the same complete or correct status for its findings as analyses in some other areas of psychology. This approach does not attend to extended biographical talk which is of interest to life history researchers and others. Instead, “it analyses the emergent biographical details and the ways that these are mobilised and harnessed to support speakers’ broader ongoing identity projects” (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p.29). Furthermore, the interest is not simply in the telling of ‘how it was’, but rather in how narratives are retrospectively constructed, shaped in the talk for the particular purposes of the current interaction.

#### **3.4.5. *Trustworthiness of analysis***

A personal narrative is not meant to represent an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world ‘out there’. From a social constructionist perspective, the focus of investigation is not on the factual representation of a reproduction of the past, but rather on how participants make meaning of the past through the stories they choose to tell about it in the present. The existential significance of a personal narrative lies in how it produces meanings which count as real, authentic or true for the narrator (Smith, 1983, cited in Langellier, 1989). A narrative analysis approach therefore does not assume objectivity, but rather, subjectivity and positionality. The perspectives of both narrator and analyst contribute to the “truths” or knowledge claims of a personal narrative (Riessman, 2001). For instance, not only are narratives laced with social discourses and power relations, but our readings of data are themselves located in discourses (feminist, scientific, therapeutic). Therefore, the idea of narration invokes the inevitability of alternative descriptions: it is always possible to narrate and analyse the same events in radically different ways, depending on the values and interests of the narrator and researcher.

Hence, the traditional notions of reliability simply do not apply to the evaluation of narrative analytic studies, and validity must be significantly reconceptualised.

Following Riessman’s guidelines (1993), I will provide the following information in



order to enable others to determine the trustworthiness of my work: describing how my interpretations were produced; making visible what I did; specifying how I accomplished successive transformations; making primary data available; and bringing my assumptions and values to the surface.

### **3.5. Analytical framework of narrative analysis: an interactional, performative and narrative-discursive approach**

In this section I discuss the theoretical framework that I used for the analysis of my data. It includes interactional, performative and narrative-discursive research approaches.

#### ***3.5.1. Thinking analytically about narratives in qualitative research***

The collection of narratives has become a central feature of qualitative research in many social sciences. The main focus of research on stories and story-telling has traditionally been on the cognitive functions of an individual: personal narratives have been investigated as a sense-making device, organising our memories, life-histories and personal identities, and establishing coherence across past, present and possibly future experience. Lately, research on social interaction, especially conversation analysis, has increasingly pointed out that stories and storytelling also have interactional functions.

However, it has been suggested that too many authors are complicit in the general culture of the 'interview society', and are too ready to celebrate narratives and biographical accounts in an unreflective way, or without subjecting them to systematic analysis (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). It is a common failing, for instance, to imply that informants' voices 'speak for themselves' (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Thus, although there is ample opportunity and scope to examine the forms and functions of narratives from both naturally occurring settings and research interview encounters, these analytic opportunities are not always identified or exploited to the full (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006).

Recent theories of narrative highlight the different functions and roles that narratives can have: as a particular form and structure of discourse; as a form of knowing the social world; as a perspective and frame of action; as a form of human being and

identity; and as a mode of human interaction. Social scientists are increasingly encouraged to treat narratives as ‘accounts’, ‘performances’ and ‘talk’. Such accounts are not transparent and should not be seen to reveal a consistent and coherent representation of a reality that is independent of the talk itself. Rather, these narratives are creating and constructing the realities they are attempting to describe (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Accordingly, many narrative researchers now examine the interview as an interactional and performative act, through which identities are enacted, actions are justified and recounted events are retrospectively constructed (Atkinson & Coffey, 2002).

Narrative research encourages the development of a knowledge base that privileges dialogue amongst researchers and practitioners. One of the values of narrative analysis is that a better understanding of psychosocial experience and meaning-making can offer suggestions of how people may act on their social constructions or their experiences of a particular position. The aim is to attend to suggested consequences of the interpretive reality (Josselson, 2006).

### ***3.5.2. An interactional approach to narrative***

A distinction has been made between “narrative inquiry scholars” (Georgakopoulou, 2006) or “expressivists” (Freeman, 2003), who use narrative as a method or a means to an end, and “narrative analysts” (Georgakopoulou, 2006) or “productivists” (Freeman, 2003) who prioritise the ‘how’ of narrative tellings and for whom the study of narrative can be an end in itself. However, the boundaries between these two positions have become less distinct; narrative analysts are increasingly having their say about the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ of narrative, through a reaffirmed belief in the importance of the communicative ‘how’ (Georgakopoulou, 2006). However, Georgakopoulou (2006) suggests that the issue has more to do with what is seen as narrative and as narrative data and less to do with questions of method, theories of self, and differences in analysis. She, and others (Bamberg, 2006), have put forth a case for under-represented narrative data - “small stories” that tend to be different from the prototypical and fully-fledged ‘grand narrative’ of personal past experience.

‘Life history’ or ‘biographic’ interview methods are designed to produce extended, uninterrupted narratives about ‘the life story’ and life’s stories, often requiring passivity or minimal response on the part of the interviewer (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006). The aim

of these approaches, for example the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf, 2004) and the Free Association Narrative Interview method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2004), is to produce stories unhindered by the norms of social interaction relevant to their production (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006). Research participants engage in a “contrived situation” based on the assumption that their experiences are readily available to be ‘dumped’ from memory, with minimal prompting, and minimal attention to how talk is shaped by and for their interactional contingencies (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006, p.57). These approaches do not take into account as part of the analysis the situated, artifactual nature of researcher-elicited accounts, and thus treat interviews as ‘resource’ rather than ‘topic’ (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006).

In contrast to the more ‘traditional’ narrative research of the ‘personal narrative’ interview, my study uses a discursive-analytic framework that includes a focus on the interactional dimensions of narrative. It draws from several areas, including social constructionism (Gergen, 2001), discursive psychology (Wetherell, 1998; Edwards & Potter, 1992), discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), narrative analysis (Bruner, 1994; Bruner, 1991; Bruner, 1990) and positioning theory (Bamberg, 2006; Bamberg, 1997). The interest is in how stories are told within the particular context of the research interview, and what actions are accomplished in their telling. Here the interactive and social nature of ‘accounting’ is acknowledged and not seen as a ‘contamination’ of the interview. Therefore, I consider ‘narrative’ as both a resource and a topic in itself.

From this perspective, the focus of narrative is not only on content (i.e. what speakers make their talk about), but also on ‘the telling moment’ (narrating as an activity that takes place between people) (Bamberg, 2006). Recently, a number of researchers have made similar points by orienting toward and emphasising more strongly the situated and contextual nature of narrating as activities. It has been suggested that we define and study narratives “as interactions” (Shuman, 2006), “as a form of action, of performance” (Blommaert, 2006), “as discursive actions” (Gergen & Gergen, 2006), and as what “people are doing when they tell stories, and therefore, what stories are designed to do” (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006). Bamberg (2006) refers to the analysis of people’s talk - what people do with their talk - and how they accomplish and index a sense of self, or identity, when they engage in story-telling talk. In summary, narratives cannot be taken simply and solely for what has been said and told; rather, they have to be analysed. These alternative approaches have been coined “the second wave of

narrative analysis” (Georgakopoulou, 2006, p.123) and currently seems to emerge as “a ‘new’ narrative turn” (p. 128).

### ***3.5.3. A performative approach to identity construction***

The characterisation of experience and life as internally organised texts, presentable in narrative form and content, has been characterised critically in terms of story as ‘cognitive’ or ‘psychological structure’ (Gergen & Gergen, 2006; Kraus, 2006). Bamberg (2006) argues that narrative and the interpretation of selves (and others) cannot be assumed to be solely based on internal (psychological) constructs - since this would seriously underestimate the dialogical/discursive origins of our interiors. Thus, in contrast, the new narrative turn does not prioritise a unified, coherent, autonomous, reflected upon and rehearsed self, but scrutinises the fleeting, contingent, fragmented, multiple and relational selves (Georgakopoulou, 2006).

During interviews, participants negotiate how they want to be known by the stories they develop collaboratively with the interviewer. Rather than “reveal” an essential self, participants perform a preferred self, selected from the multiplicity of selves that individuals switch between as they go about their lives (Riessman, 2001). Thinking about identity as a “performative struggle over the meanings of experience’ (Langellier, 2001, cited in Riessman, 2001) opens up analytic possibilities that are missed with static conceptions of identity, and essentialising theories that assume the unity of an “inner” self (Riessman, 2001). From this perspective, narratives are not viewed as closed units, but as a multifaceted resource for the understanding of self-construction (Kraus, 2006). In order to understand this construction, we need to analyse the processes (the telling) as well as the relationships (between teller and listener) and the form and content of such self-stories (Kraus, 2006).

From a social constructionist view, personal and social identities are seen to be constructed, contested and negotiated in discursive practices (Schrauf, 2000). From this perspective, linguistic and conversational choices can be seen as acts of identity (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005). From an interactional perspective, identity is understood to be dynamically constructed in the process of interaction rather than given or static. The presentation of self is enacted in a discursive context with the interviewer, and can be analysed with detailed transcriptions (Riessman, 2001).

In summary, analysing narratives-in-interaction presents a situated approach to narrative analysis where the focus is on what participants make currently relevant in the interactive setting. The interactive space between participants is the arena in which identities are performed and where they can be micro-analytically accessed (Bamberg, 2004). This approach differs from those theories that view identity-making as a process of reflecting upon an individual's experience rather than by positioning one's own experience vis-à-vis others who are physically present in a setting (Hermans, 1996; McAdams, 1993, cited in Bamberg, 2004)

#### ***3.5.4. A narrative-discursive research approach***

Adding to the above interactional and performative research perspectives, Taylor and Littleton's (2006) narrative-discursive approach adds a valuable layer to the analysis of my data.

A narrative-discursive approach assumes that people's biographical talk is shaped both by the unique circumstances of their lives and the meanings at play within the wider society. Building on a well-established body of work in social psychology including discourse analysis and discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and narrative analysis in psychology (Gergen, 1994; Bruner, 1991; Bruner, 1990), Taylor and Littleton's (2006) narrative-discursive approach understands narrative as

“a situated construction, produced for and constituted within each new occasion of talk but shaped by previously presented versions and also by understandings which prevail in the wider discursive environment” (p.23).

Here the telling of a life narrative is viewed as a socially situated action and an identity performance that combines both form and content (Mischler, 1999, cited in Reynolds et al., 2007). Therefore, people do not simply relay information about themselves in their talk. Rather, people re-interpret their past for the present purposes of the telling, and they “present stories by drawing on culturally available resources, performing their identities in ways that will vary according to context and purpose” (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005, p.199).

From a narrative-discursive approach, talk is analysed in order to show more exactly how the wider discursive environment is implicated in a speakers' biographical talk, i.e. how it constrains or resources it. Taylor and Littleton (2006) propose that a narrative-discursive analysis of interview material can explore the shared features or commonalities in participants' talk, for example of established meanings and life trajectories which are seen as typical; in addition, it can show the identity work through which these available meanings are taken up or resisted and (re)-negotiated.

Importantly, this constructed nature of a personal biography suggests that talk is not just an isolated interaction with the other person(s) present but takes place on several levels simultaneously as a speaker also responds to imagined or previously experienced audiences and criticisms (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Therefore, the communicative context in which the talk takes place does not only refer to the here-and-now interaction of the two speakers; one must also consider the expanded notion of the communicative context to include known assumptions, arguments and counter-claims around a topic (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005). For example, in talking about a topic like intimate partner violence, the talk of the participants in this study can show - how in answering an interviewer's questions about their own lives - speakers also take up positions in ongoing political debates around gender and power etc. This kind of 'talking against' established ideas is what Billig (1987) calls "rhetorical" work.

Taylor and Littleton's approach (2006) assumes that a speaker is positioned by others as having a certain identity, but also actively positions her or himself; therefore, identities are both conferred and actively claimed and contested. Some discourse analytic studies are concerned with the detail of turn-taking, where the interest is in how the subject positions are made available and taken up in the turn-by-turn of the immediate interaction (Wetherell, 1998; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Taylor and Littleton (2006) opt for a more expanded, discursive and narrative focus: rather than look for a narrative in a single extended stretch of talk which has perhaps been elicited by a single question (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Schiffrin, 1997), the focus is on the sequential or consequential structuring of the version of a personal biography produced in a particular interaction, in this case, the research interview. Taylor and Littleton (2006) look at how a version of a life story functions for a speaker in a particular interaction, for example, to support a claim to a particular identity, and how understandings prevailing within the wider society facilitate or constrain such identity work.

This approach furthermore explores a speaker's reflections on her ongoing and previous identity work and her awareness of consistencies and contradictions. Here one attends to inconsistencies that may create "trouble" in identity work, and that will require explanation or repair, "such as repeated restatement and explanation to counter expectations of something different" (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p.33).

#### **3.5.4.1. Self-narration as rehearsal**

As described earlier, discourse analysts and discursive psychologists emphasise that identities are multiple and occasioned, with a particular focus on how people are positioned in talk (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). However, post-modern theorists have been criticised for overstating the complexity and intersection of identities, and understating the continuity of identity (Crossley, 2000). In contrast, analysts of life stories (Linde, 1997; Schiffrin, 1997) consider how participants' biographical narratives are shaped in the telling, possibly over the course of an extended interaction rather than in successive turns of conversation. A narrative-discursive approach unites these concerns, "looking at a biographical narrative as a situated version of previous tellings, which is constructed as part of a speaker's ongoing identity work" (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p.25).

Compared to approaches where identity is primarily conceived as developing through self-reflection and not discourse (Thorne, 2004), there are some shortcomings to a situated narrative analysis approach that need to be acknowledged. The assumption that even total strangers can make sense of each other in short, brief segments of interactions, may reduce these interactants in terms of their histories of personal experiences. Furthermore, the attempt to remain analytically unbiased and admit into the analysis only what is made relevant or 'demonstrably attended to' by the participants of the interaction may strip individuals of their history (Bamberg, 2004).

Given the above criticisms, Taylor (2005) contributes an interesting and useful perspective: she comments on the multiple and complex nature of identity including ways that speakers are already positioned at the outset of any occasion of talk. These would include the positionings given by previous tellings, and also the 'always already' positionings given by any speaker's appearance, preliminaries to talk, and the context in which the speakers meet. Taylor (2005) argues that a narrative and discourse analysis of

talk often neglects the rehearsed nature of the talk which is part of the extended process through which identities are constructed and taken up. “Although identity work is situated and a new version of an ‘up to now’ life narrative is presented on a particular occasion as part of a particular interaction, it is a new *version* and not a wholly new creation” (Taylor, 2005, p.48). A speaker’s investment in certain subject positions can thus be understood as a consequence of some identity work becoming established through repetition and rehearsal.

Although identity work continues throughout a lifetime, this concept of self-narration as rehearsal seems particularly important for younger people, who are still very busy constructing identities, and have almost certainly had less opportunity to establish stories of self through repeated tellings (Taylor, 2005). From this perspective, a research interview may be “a congenial performance context for such rehearsal” (p. 49), and an attractive medium for identity work (Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



In this chapter I simultaneously present and discuss my results. In line with my objectives and methodological framework, and in an attempt to provide some structure, I have chosen to organise my results along the following lines: 1) attending to *content* (when invited to talk about IPV and intimate relationships what do young adults make their talk about?); attending to *structure* (what structures and word choice do participants use in order to organise their stories and to promote understanding and interpretation of their experiences?); and attending to *the telling moment* (telling as performance and interaction). However, it is important to note that illustration and discussion of these three areas do inevitably connect and overlap with one another; in talking about the ‘what’ of the telling, I inevitably also consider aspects of the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of the telling.

In this chapter I present detailed extracts from the research interviews (and one focus group). My interest here is to employ an interpretive thrust of narrative analysis (Lempert, 1994) by looking at how participants make sense of - and talk about - things, and how as researcher I can systematically go about interpreting their interpretations. Using a narrative analytic approach, I furthermore give specific attention to the details of language-use, and attend to how participants use language to construct meaning in interaction with me as interviewer. The presentation of detailed extracts is aimed at allowing for possible alternative readings. In several extracts I include my questions and responses as interviewer in order to highlight the interactional context of the talk.

For ease of reference I have included a thumbnail sketch of the participants whom I have quoted in this results and discussion chapter (see the following page). A few participants were regularly selected to illustrate a number of different themes. These participants were not only chosen for their discursive eloquence, but were also frequently referred to in an attempt to offer some narrative continuity in the discussion of the results.

The 19 female participants had a mean age of 20.4 years. The majority were students in the discipline of Psychology within the Faculty of Humanities, with smaller numbers from the faculties of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Health Sciences and Engineering. Given the nature and focus of the discipline of Psychology, I did expect

that many psychology students would be willing and interested to volunteer their participation in this process.

The women came to talk about a range of first- and second-hand experiences with intimate partner violence - as witnesses to their father's abuse of their mothers, as victims of partner violence in their own intimate relationships, or as observers to intimate partner violence in the relationships of their peers. In this study, 11 of the 19 female participants had first-hand experiences of partner violence: all of them experienced emotional abuse; five of them told about their experiences of physical abuse; and only one woman explicitly spoke about her experience of sexual abuse. With regards second-hand and other experiences: five women spoke about their fathers who were physically and emotionally abusive towards their mothers, and how this experience impacted on their personal intimate relationships; three women came to tell a story of a good friend who was in an abusive relationship; two women were motivated to participate because they had strong views and opinions about IPV; and two women were struggling with their personal power in their current intimate relationships.

The male participants had a mean age of 22 years. These young men were studying Psychology or Medicine at UCT. Although only one man had a personal experience with abuse from a partner, the other men were generally interested in – and concerned about - the issue of IPV, and wanted to talk about general troubles they were experiencing in their current relationships. These men believed they had valuable experiences and perspectives to contribute.

**ALPHABETICAL THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF PARTICIPANTS QUOTED IN  
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION CHAPTER**

NAME	DETAILS
Andre	A 21 year old White man who came to talk about his perceptions and knowledges of intimate relationships and IPV in general, and who made reference to a previously emotionally controlling ex-girlfriend
Christina	A 21 year old White woman who participated in the focus group, and told of her emotionally abusive relationship with her ex-boyfriend
Claudia	A 20 year old White woman who spoke about her father's severe verbal abuse towards the family
Darren	A 21 year old White man who reflected on his difficulties in managing and sustaining healthy intimate relationships – and linked these struggles to his vulnerable relationship with his parents.
Debbie	A 21 year old White woman who participated in the focus group, and spoke about her emotionally and physically abusive relationship with her ex-boyfriend
Elma	A 21 year old White woman who participated in the focus group, and came to share her views and opinions of IPV
Felicia	A 20 year old Coloured woman who came to talk about her experiences of emotional and sexual abuse in her relationship with her ex-boyfriend
Feroza	A 20 year old Coloured woman who had experienced severe physical abuse in her relationship with her ex-boyfriend, ranging from hand twisting, to neck choking and head banging
Kobus	A 21 year old White man who reflected on his difficulties in managing and sustaining healthy intimate relationships – and linked these to the lack of positive role-modelling in his relationships with his parents.
Priya	A 20 year old Indian woman whose father was physically and emotionally abusive towards her mother
Sally	A 19 year old White woman who spoke about her concern for a good friend who was currently in an abusive relationship
Sheetal	A 20 year old Indian woman who came to tell about several experiences with IPV: her father's severe and frequent physical abuse towards her mother; her brother's emotional and physical abuse of his girlfriend; and her own physical violence in intimate relationships
Thabo	A 24 year old African man who expressed concern at his girlfriend's expectation that he should have dominant power and control in their relationship
Thandi	A 20 year old African woman who told about her experiences with a very jealous, possessive and controlling boyfriend
Xabiso	A 23 year old African man whose current girlfriend was physically abusive towards him

#### 4.1. Attending to content

In this section I attend to what young adults made their talk about during their research participation on intimate relationships and intimate partner violence. I illustrate and discuss themes and patterns that emerged within and across interviews, and situate the findings within the context of existing focus areas/thematic categories and/or methodological strands described earlier in my literature review chapter. Throughout the discussion I make note of how my study's results are different from - or add to - existing knowledges, understandings and perspectives.

Importantly, there were more similarities than differences across the narratives of the participants. However, where noteworthy, I attend to differences and contradictions within and across participants' talk.

My study's particular content focus on the experiences, knowledges, understandings and perspectives of young men and women (18-25 years) with regard to intimate partner violence has not been a major focal point in existing literature, and will therefore contribute important perspectives to the field. In addition to the 'what' of young adults' talk of intimate partner violence, my simultaneous attention to the 'how' and 'why' of the telling will add a multi-layered meaningfulness to these new narrative understandings.

#### ***4.1.1. Telling about emotional abuse***

Importantly, all of the female and male participants revealed a thoughtful and reflective engagement with - and knowledge of - the issue of intimate partner violence; this was clearly something that they had either experienced first- or second-hand, or had thought about. The women primarily told stories of emotional abuse characterised by excessive jealousy and possessiveness, control and manipulation, denigration and verbal insults, public humiliation, the boyfriend's suicidal threats, constant criticism and blaming, threats of separation and reprisals, and social isolation. Men - with and without personal experience of emotional abuse - offered very similar understandings; they described emotional abuse as a misuse of power characterised by emotional neglect, criticism, denigration, blaming, possessiveness and verbal insults. Both women and men described emotional abuse as subtle and implicit in the often private and/or everyday interactions of the relationship. Any expression of physical and/or sexual aggression was understood as an extension and manifestation of the emotional abuse.

The narratives of the participants in this study suggest that stories of emotional abuse are central to how young men and women experience – and think about – intimate partner violence. Similar to descriptions of emotional abuse identified in my literature review, the young women and men in this study highlighted control and manipulation (Lammers, Ritchie & Robertson, 2005), and social control through excessive jealousy (Lavoie et al., 2000) as core characteristics of emotional abuse. In addition, both private and public displays of criticism, denigration, humiliation and possessiveness were highlighted. As described by Rosen and colleagues (2005), emotional abuse had both an expressive and instrumental motivation, and was often the primary means of exerting a general pattern of control in the relationship.

Similar to the findings from previous studies with South African women (Boonzaier & De la Rey, 2003) and South African heterosexual couples (Boonzaier, 2008), both the male and female participants in this study understood the dynamic of IPV to involve an abuse of power. Participants linked their experiences of being manipulated, bullied, pressured, belittled, blamed and/or disrespected to their partners' attempts to gain and maintain dominance and control in the relationship. These results therefore underscore the importance of attending to issues of power and control when analysing how men and women make meaning of their experiences of intimate relationships and partner violence.

Aside from one woman who spoke about her own emotional abusiveness - only the men pointed out that both men and women can and do experience emotional abuse in their relationships; specifically, men had observed both men and women acting in possessive, controlling and manipulative ways. The male participants' knowledges of emotional abuse indicate that emotional abuse is not just a female experience, and is likely to be a familiar concept to some men.

Given the often hidden nature of it, a few men and women struggled to guess how serious and common the problem of IPV was amongst their peers. Nevertheless, every single participant could relate an incident of knowing about a friend, acquaintance or member of their community – whether male or female - who had experienced some form of physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse in their intimate relationship. This

finding suggests that many young adults have some story to tell with regards intimate partner violence.

An important finding – not identified in my literature review - was that women underscored the difficulty in explicitly defining and explaining their experiences of emotional abuse to others. These women commented on the dilemma of proving their experiences of emotional abuse to friends; given the absence of physical scars and bruises, women were concerned with the ambiguity of claiming victim status. Ironically, the similarities in the knowledges and descriptions of emotional abuse across participants in this study – both male and female – indicate that peers are likely to grasp and accept the credibility of ‘emotional abuse’ claims.

Participants with personal experiences of IPV spoke about the devastating impact of IPV on their sense of self and future relationships. Significantly, both men and women – with and without experiences of IPV - communicated their understanding that the damage and impact of emotional abuse can often feel more painful and destructive than acts of physical abuse. In telling about the hurt she experienced due to emotional abuse, one woman commented that her boyfriend “didn’t necessarily have to pick up a stick or a brick” to injure her; another woman spoke about how her boyfriend’s words could “kill” her, i.e. his words had the power to destroy and annihilate her. Two women with experiences of IPV spoke about the constant fear and intimidation which they felt both during and after these abusive relationships.

Several women noted the precarious nature of emotional abuse – they were only able to recognise its nature, impact and implications much later in their relationships, or after having ended their relationships. Women who had not experienced physical violence in their emotionally abusive relationships commented that such incidents would have alerted and alarmed them early on in the relationship, and would have resulted in them identifying the abuse - and leaving the relationship - sooner. Therefore, this study alerts to the fact that young women who are in intimate relationships characterised by emotional abuse may find it particularly difficult to identify and name the abuse timeously.

For several women, and one man, emotional abuse was accompanied by physical aggression and violence, ranging from ‘rough play’ to slapping, pushing, shoving,

punching, hitting and choking; physical abuse mostly occurred in private. Only one woman explicitly spoke about her experiences of sexual abuse - her boyfriend forced her to engage in degrading sexual activities against her will; his efforts were characterised by verbal insistence, pleading, emotional and physical intimidation and humiliation. Several women who were experiencing emotional and physical abuse were not yet sexually active in their relationships, however, it is possible that future sexual interactions would have been abusive. As discussed in the literature review, the dividing line between sexual negotiation and sexual coercion can be obscure, and coercive sexual activity can to a large extent seem consensual (Serquina-Ramiro, 2005). For example, one woman denied sexual coercion, but admitted to engaging in sexual intimacy with her boyfriend after a series of persuasions, pleading and 'nagging'.

Women with first-hand experience of partner violence spoke about their newfound empathy and compassion for adult women who were unable to leave long-term abusive relationships/marriages. Given their personal experiences, these women were mindful about the complexity of the situation; although all of them had managed to end their relationships with their abusive partners, they could imagine themselves having stayed with their boyfriends despite the abuse. Therefore, young women with experiences of partner violence seem to be very mindful of the critical judgement of abused women who 'stay', and their ability to identify to some extent with these 'other' women can possibly help to generate tolerance amongst their peers.

After their experiences with intimate partner violence, the female and male participants in this study were consciously intent on negotiating equality in their current or future relationships – once again highlighting the importance of considering the issue of power when talking about intimate relationships. Participants spoke about their ideas of 'good' relationships, characterised by respect, honesty, transparency, equal power sharing and effective communication. By talking about their understandings of 'good' relationships, and their intentions to actively create such relationships in the future, these participants positioned themselves as informed and empowered young adults.

In summary, the talk of the young women and men in this study highlight the centrality and complexity of emotional abuse in their experiences and understandings of intimate partner violence. Within this context, the issue of power is integral to young adults' attempts at making meaning of – and negotiating - their intimate relationships.

Therefore, research studies and interventions that focus mainly on physical and/or sexual abuse in young people's relationships will fail to capture this very important dimension and dynamic of partner violence. Importantly, despite their concerns that the legitimacy of their emotional abuse claims will be challenged by their peers, the results of this study show that young adults - not only share many knowledges and understandings of the nature and impact of emotional abuse, but also – are successful in finding a language for the expression of their experiences.

#### ***4.1.2. Naming - and talking about - the abuse: implications for self-presentation***

An important understanding that emerged from the results of this study is that the process of naming – and talking about - their experiences of intimate partner violence is not an easy or straightforward experience for young women and men; nevertheless, young adults attend to this process very carefully and consciously – mostly because it has significant implications for how they succeed in their self-presentation goals. It is also here that the use of language in constructing meaning becomes an important focus. Although the methodological importance of considering self-presentation goals have been addressed in both intimate partner violence - and qualitative research - literature, it has not been a main area of investigation in any intimate partner violence studies conducted with young women and men in particular.

The young adults in this study noted their reluctance to talk to their peers and/or families about their personal experiences of partner violence, and were acutely aware of how their decision to share these stories might impact negatively on their reputations, friendships and identities.

Two of the five male participants noted that men will speak about their intimate relationships when in an informal and relaxed social environment with a small group of trusted male friends. Nevertheless, all of the male participants acknowledged that it's hard for men to talk openly about their relationships, especially if they are experiencing abuse, or feel that their girlfriends have more personal power than they do. This can partly explain why some men might have felt uncomfortable about the invitation to participate in this particular research project, and why all the male respondents opted for participation in individual interviews, as opposed to focus group discussions.



In addition, and as pointed out by Boonzaier (2008), the problem of woman abuse has received a fair amount of attention from governmental and social service agencies in South Africa, as well as the media. In light of the social construction of woman abuse as a significant problem, a man who admits to being violent in his intimate relationships has limited options for negotiating a positive identity. Therefore, some men who have known themselves to be violent in their relationships might have felt that their interests would not be best served by participating in this study about partner violence – or talking to a female researcher about their abusive behaviour. However, in her study with men who had been violent, Boonzaier's experience was that gender was not a significant barrier to obtaining personal and sensitive information (2008). Similarly, the five men who responded to my study clearly welcomed the opportunity to speak candidly about their relationships. By showing a keen and non-judgemental interest in their experiences, and asking questions directly related to their telling, the young men spoke openly with me, and gladly elaborated on their perspectives.

All of the women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence at some point in their interviews named - and spoke about - their experiences as abusive, violent or controlling. As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, all of the women had already ended their abusive relationships at the time of the interview, and were telling retrospective stories of their experiences. Several women marvelled at the fact that they had managed to survive their experiences of abuse; for example, some mentioned the devastating impact of the abuse on their health, relationships and academic studies.

Although all of the female participants could speak at length about their knowledges and understandings of intimate partner violence, the majority commented that young people in general are reluctant to talk to each other about their personal experiences of partner violence. Participants from both the Health Sciences and Humanities disciplines had engaged with classmates around the topic of intimate partner violence from an academic and/or clinical perspective, but felt circumspect in revealing too much information about themselves. Having had a father who was abusive was a particularly difficult story for women to share with friends.

The young women and men in this study expressed concern about how a story of IPV might damage their reputations, identities and friendships (to be discussed further in the next thematic category). Their concerns resonate with several findings discussed in the

literature review chapter. Men were possibly avoiding being emasculated and marginalised by their male peers (Migliaccio, 2001), and women were likely avoiding or rejecting a 'victim' status – since it often carries with it shame, humiliation and the risk of being viewed as irresponsible and whining (Lamb, 1999). The idea of being a 'victim' can be a stigmatising and constraining definition that can make it difficult for young women to reconcile an experience of 'victimisation' with perceiving agency in themselves. Certainly, women in this study wanted to present themselves as empowered, contained and in control, and did not want to be judged by others as passive, weak and culpable for their experiences.

Importantly, the young women with first-hand experiences of intimate partner violence both opted for – and resisted – naming their experiences as 'abusive', and a few of them shifted their subject positions several times during their interview. This tendency to simultaneously draw from – and reject – victim discourses in their processes of self-construction and self-representation has been described in existing literature (Leisenring, 2006), however, the young women in this study did so for qualitatively different and/or additional reasons.

The women in Leisenring's study (2006), with a mean age of 32 years, most often rejected a victim identity to distance themselves from the notion that they were powerless, weak and culpable for their experiences. Similarly, the younger women in my study resisted 'victim' status for the same reasons; in addition, they challenged this status out of active efforts to underscore their power and agency and to protect their reputations and identities.

Referring again to the women in Leisenring's study (2006) – most of them claimed a victim identity to convey that they had suffered a harm they could not control and to show they were deserving of sympathy and support. In contrast, the young women in my study expressed qualitatively different intentions for wanting to claim victim status. These women named – and told about – their victimisation experiences out of a desire to finally speak honestly and candidly about their knowledges and experiences of intimate partner violence, to draw attention to the social problem of IPV, and to emphasise its insidious nature. Paradoxically, by refusing to remain silent and choosing to emphasise their past victimisation in intimate relationships, women felt able to – reconnect with their inner resistance, and to – reclaim a sense of independence, insight, personal power

and agency. Nevertheless, it's important to note that despite doing so in the context of the research interview – which possibly held fewer implications for their social lives and identities – women admitted that they struggled to do the same in relation to their peers and families.

It's also helpful to remember that the women in this study were young and hopeful, and were faced with the task of constructing new identities that were not primarily informed by the painful memories and experiences of their recent abusive relationships. As found elsewhere (Loseke, 2001), the women in this study were likely defending against the 'abused woman' identity being used as a pervasive and master narrative influencing all aspects of their lives in the past, present and future; furthermore, the identity of the 'abused woman' was not the women's preferred or only resource for interpreting and structuring their subjective self.

It's important to note that I often used the words 'abuse' and/or 'intimate partner violence' during interviews – thereby revealing my meaning-making to the participants. During my process of analysing the interviews, a few questions came to my mind: how important was it for me that the women/men name their experience as 'abuse' or 'intimate partner violence'? Did I make an assumption that this act of naming the abuse was integral to a successful process of meaning-making? Did I show respect, curiosity and support for participants who wanted to think and talk differently about their experiences? Certainly I think that across interviews, my questions and comments revealed my meaning-making of their stories of partner violence, thereby communicating the meanings, assumptions and arguments I was bringing to the interaction. Alongside being honest and transparent in positioning and clarifying my personal and professional meaning-making when I understood participants to be speaking about emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse in their intimate relationships, I did consciously aim to facilitate a respectful and safe discursive space in which participants could talk about their experiences in whichever ways were helpful to them.

However, on one occasion I caught myself trying to 'persuade' a woman that her experiences were indeed abusive – my assumption at the time being that only by naming the abuse would she be able to fully understand and integrate the nature and impact of her experience. In retrospect, the memory of this particular interaction makes me feel embarrassed and alarmed, but thankfully reminded me to be more conscious of

– and to take responsibility for - my constitutive influence in the production of the interview narratives. My experiences in this study have highlighted the importance of giving young women and men the space in which to speak the contradictions and ambiguities of their experience (Wilson & Strebel, 2004).

The following extract from an interview with Felicia<sup>1</sup>, a 20 year old Coloured woman, illustrates how some women grappled with how to name and define their experiences of ‘abuse’. After telling me about her experiences of emotional and sexual abuse in her relationship with her boyfriend, Felicia still doubts and questions the relevance and legitimacy of the label of ‘abuse’, and notes the implications of accepting this meaning-making.

Extract 1<sup>2</sup>: Felicia

- 1 Adele So, did a lot of things come up for you during that lecture?
- 2 Felicia Um, the thing is like I never thought of it as ‘violence’, or anything,  
3 or ‘abuse’, and like you mentioned it, and I was like ‘oh my word,  
4 that sounds so familiar’ (laughs), and that was a bit scary, um, and  
5 I’ve never really - like I’ve told two people - because it’s not  
6 something you want to think or speak about (.)
- 7 Adele So there were things we spoke about in the lecture that sounded  
8 familiar to you?
- 9 Felicia Yeah, like it was always in the back of my head, ‘is it abusive?’ but  
10 then I said, ‘no, it’s not’, ‘it can’t be’, you know, abuse is too much of  
11 a big (.) it’s like it can’t happen to me, it’s too big deal (.) it’s like  
12 something you hear about it and you feel terrible if someone was to  
13 do that, but to actually identify that, even if it wasn’t really that bad  
14 or anything, the fact that there was part of it maybe (.)
- 15 Adele That’s quite scary...
- 16 Felicia Yeah, the moment you admit it, you realise, ‘oh my god, I have a  
17 problem’, and I don’t think anybody wants to know they have a  
18 problem - especially like in that way (.) and after that lecture I was  
19 actually thinking about stuff, like how I am now and how I am with  
20 people now, and it actually really changed things, it changed a lot of  
21 things, I just didn’t realise it (laughs), but anyway (.)
- 22 Adele You said earlier that you almost didn’t want to see it or think about it  
23 as abuse. When did you start thinking that maybe it was abuse? How  
24 did you make sense of it?
- 25 Felicia Um, I knew it was wrong, but I didn’t think that (.) the term ‘abuse’  
26 to me, at first, was labelled as, it was sexual abuse - sexual abuse was  
27 sexual abuse - like forcing someone to have sex, it wasn’t anything  
28 else, - physical abuse was physically hitting someone until they have  
29 blue marks - emotional abuse (.) I just never ever thought of that, and  
30 um, (.) to me it was like, it can’t, it can’t be that, you know, he’s  
31 someone I know, he’s been my friend, I mean, he knows his stuff, he  
32 can, I mean as a friend he is respectable, um, it can’t be that, and I’ve

- 33 heard like - like I always thought it could be abuse, but it's just like,  
 34 whenever the thought -it was always in the back of my head, 'could  
 35 this be?', but the moment I'd get too close to admitting it, I just  
 36 pushed it aside, 'cause I was scared to admit it, because I was like, I  
 37 was scared like when I admit it, I'm admitting it as abuse but how do  
 38 I deal with the fact that it's abuse - I have nowhere to go, I have  
 39 nobody to speak to, I can't speak to anybody, I was ashamed of it,  
 40 especially, I mean that he pushed me and that he got his way, you  
 41 know, I was ashamed of it and I felt like if I do admit it, it will be too  
 42 much to handle, and um, I never actually thought of it as abuse until  
 43 your lecture [...] and I think that's why it got to me, because for the  
 44 first time in 5 years almost like I admitted it, and we were writing out  
 45 the forms and I was putting down my name and even then, I put my  
 46 name down but I still didn't want ownership of it  
 47 [...]
- 48 Adele And how does it feel to actually put this story together in this way –  
 49 to talk about your experiences as 'abuse'?
- 50 Felicia It's sort of closure, it is, even though I didn't want to admit it, and it  
 51 is going to be much more to deal with, but it's closure I suppose (.)  
 52 [...]
- 53 I think I first need to deal with the fact that - yeah, it's like I'm very  
 54 broken still, you know, and I think I first need to deal with that and  
 55 deal with the feelings of the hurt and the pain and the anger and  
 56 frustration, because I never dealt with that, I first need to deal with all  
 57 of that, I think, and then maybe come to terms, proper terms that it  
 58 was abusive, it wasn't my fault  
 59 [...]
- 60 Even as I'm sitting here, I'm thinking like, 'am I going on over  
 61 nothing? was it really abuse?', I'm still thinking all the time, 'did I  
 62 just come because I'm being dramatic? Am I being a drama queen?  
 63 Am I making a big deal about this?' It's like I still don't know, I'm  
 64 still not sure, because he always told me, like, you know, 'you're  
 65 making a big deal, why are you getting all upset', why this, why that,  
 66 like, I still think– that's why I don't wanna tell, that's why I don't tell  
 67 anybody as well, 'cause am I imagining things that didn't happen?  
 68 Am I imagining that that's what he did? You know, it's like, I'm still  
 69 not a hundred percent sure that he actually did that, and even when  
 70 I'm telling you, it's like, 'is it really abuse? Am I imagining? Is it,  
 71 you know, 'can I label it as such?' I'm still thinking, you know,  
 72 'am I here for nothing? Am I wasting your time?  
 73 [...]
- 74 I think I'm scared it's going to make everybody think, you know,  
 75 'she was abused', I'm going to get that stigma, that's why (.)

Prior to this interview, Felicia had been present at an interactive lecture I facilitated with her university class. This lecture explored the nature and impact of emotional, physical and sexual abuse within intimate relationships. In her interview, Felicia acknowledges her astonishment at how “familiar” she was with concepts of abuse and violence: this implies that she was possibly well-acquainted with IPV, and that her experience with IPV was frequent and intimate. However, despite this personal knowledge, it was

difficult and frightening for her to explicitly think about - and name - her experiences as such (lines 4-6).

It's notable how Felicia uses various words and verbs to promote her understanding of her experience: she talks of IPV that "sounds" familiar (line 4), and how she can "hear" – and "feel" - about it (line 12). These actions of hearing and feeling take place from a position of observer; Felicia's words of "something" (line 12) and "someone" (line 12) further notes this removed distance. However, it is in the actual identifying – (line 13), admitting - (lines 16,35,36,37,41,44), thinking - and speaking - (line 6) about her experiences as IPV that Felicia finds she struggles; these actions require her to concede and acknowledge "ownership" (line 46) of her experience – something she does not "want" to do (line 46). Therefore, writing down her name in response to a study on IPV was a difficult and significant turning point for her (lines 44-46).

Although Felicia has always considered the possibility of her experiences having been abusive (lines 9,34, "it was always in the back of my head"), she needed to continue believing that this could not be possible or real (line 10, "it can't be"). Felicia notes the implications of naming her experiences as "abusive" (line 9) – by admitting that something of such great importance and consequence has occurred to her (line 11, "it's too big deal"), requires her to realise and accept that she has "a problem" (lines 16-17) that she must now manage and "handle" (lines 41-42). Felicia points out that the fear and shame of such an admittance will be overwhelming for her, and she suggests that she might not be able to cope with it. Importantly, Felicia makes the link between naming an experience as abusive, and the need to tell someone about it. Therefore, the absence of someone to speak to (lines 38-39) reinforced her silence and avoidance.

Felicia can, in retrospect, recognise the impact of intimate partner violence on her current sense of self and ways of being with others (lines 19-21); although her experiences with abuse had the power and influence to alter and change such integral aspects of her identity, Felicia had not been aware of it at the time. Her laugh in line 21 possibly indicates a sense of embarrassment and a concern that I might be judging her 'failure' in this regard.

In lines 25-29 Felicia explains how she used to think about IPV in very categorical, specific, unambiguous and clear-cut terms. Although she had explicit understandings of

what sexual and physical abuse entailed and looked like, she never considered the nature of emotional abuse. Felicia then continues to provide the context in which she has struggled to admit IPV had occurred; in lines 30-32, Felicia talks of her boyfriend as a “friend” and as a “respectable” person who “knows his stuff”, i.e. she implies feelings of intimacy and trust, and suggests that he was a man of good social standing and reputation who was deserving of respect and esteem.

In response to my question in lines 48-49, Felicia talks about “closure” – implying that her decision to admit – and talk about – her experiences of IPV has offered her some sense of psychological certainty or completeness. However, later in her talk (lines 60-71) it is clear that Felicia continues to grapple with how to think and feel about her experiences – she cannot yet be sure or confident about her conclusions. Her use of the word “broken” (line 54) also conveys that she feels incomplete, fragmented, disconnected and weakened in strength; furthermore, Felicia still needs to connect with – and explore - many difficult emotions (lines 54-57).

Felicia’s phrase of coming to “proper terms” (line 57) implies that she must become resigned or accustomed to thinking about her experience as one of IPV, and suggests that the label “abusive” (line 58) is a more befitting, appropriate and accurate description of her experience.

By questioning whether she is being “a drama queen” (line 62) who is “wasting” my time (line 72), Felicia alludes to her fear and concern that she would be judged by myself (and others) as an overemotional, exaggerative or melodramatic woman who overreacts to seemingly minor incidents – this is also how her boyfriend defined her expressions of distress (lines 64-65). Felicia wonders whether she has distorted and manipulated the reality of her experience, and whether she is only “imagining” (lines 67,68,70) the abuse. In addition, Felicia acknowledges her fear of being stigmatised as an ‘abused’ woman (lines 74-75).

Felicia’s interview strongly illustrates not only the complexity and ambiguity of women’s lived experiences of partner violence, but also the complex and ambiguous process of naming the ‘abuse’. The results of this study illustrate that when telling others of their experiences of intimate partner violence, young women consciously engage with the implications of their choice of language-use and definitional meaning-

making. Therefore, their choice of words and meaning-making must be analysed within the context of the interaction in which it is used.

Furthermore, and in line with considering methodological issues in IPV research, (a theme discussed in my literature review), this study underscores the importance of researchers being positionally reflexive in how they conduct and analyse their qualitative research; following from this - the results emphasise the importance of analysing the process of negotiation and meaning-making between interviewer and interviewee.

As an aside: as illustrated in Felicia's talk (Extract 1) - and many other interview extracts to follow in this chapter - women and men in this study repetitively used the conversational phrase 'you know' throughout their talk. As a conversational style – it illustrates how young people talk in interaction with others. However, as a discursive technique, it could have been used to signal the following efforts: to establish a sense of connectedness and familiarity with me as listener and as conversational partner; to seek my reassurance and validation for what they were saying; to educate me about the subject; to assume cultural similarity and shared understandings; and/or to generalise knowledge claims by using the third-person pronoun "you". Women possibly used this phrase in an attempt to confirm that – as a woman – I share in the same knowledge and experience as them, i.e. as a woman I *do* know, and I *can* understand.

#### ***4.1.3. Protecting reputations and identities***

Extract 2: Claudia

1	Claudia	I think so many people stay in situations that are really bad for them
2		because they don't talk about it to other people [...] I don't know, it
3		seems like we have an incredible lack of that in our society, it's like
4		there's no way to get some, to bounce things off, because with
5		friends, I find that I'm always controlling my, like controlling what
6		I'm saying to them, because I don't want them to think badly about
7		my father or my boyfriend or whatever because he's a reflection of
8		me, and I, I like chose him. You kind of need somebody whose not
9		making a judgment, and maybe just saying like, 'well, maybe that's
10		not so good', and it's so difficult, um, because there is a lot of
11		judgement between friends and it's not really the right place to bring
12		that other stuff



## Extract 3: Felicia

- 1 Felicia I'd always defend him against everybody else, and that's the sad, I  
 2 don't know why I did it, I just did, um, I think it's also a part of the  
 3 whole - you don't want to admit that it's happening to you, so you're  
 4 defending him so that you don't seem so weak to other people, so it  
 5 doesn't seem so bad (.)  
 6 [...]  
 7 Also, the reason I don't want to tell anybody is because I know if I  
 8 tell them they're going to hate him, I know that, and I don't want that  
 9 - even if he's done that to me I don't want them to hate him, I don't  
 10 want them to have a grudge, I don't want them to have anything  
 11 against him.
- 12 Adele To judge him
- 13 Felicia To judge him, and yeah, that's just a fact, I don't want them  
 14 to, and that's why I don't tell them, every time I see, I start, it's like  
 15 I'd tell them about his possessiveness, and they'll ask, 'is there  
 16 aggression', and I stop and say, 'no, that's all', I can't handle telling  
 17 them about the aggression, it's too much, I could have told them, I  
 18 don't know why, I'm actually still scared, I'm scared that he's going  
 19 to find out that I said something and that I labelled him as an abuser,  
 20 and I'm going to get it and it's not going to stop, that's why

As described by Chung (2005), commitment to the relationship can result in an interdependence of identities, which in turn can ambush young women into speaking about and presenting their boyfriends' behaviours and identities in ways that do not tarnish their own. Similarly, and as illustrated by the above two extracts, women in this study made past efforts to protect the reputations of their abusive boyfriends or fathers, and to divert attention away from behaviours (such as jealousy, possessiveness and/or aggression) being interpreted as signs of male control, power or abuse. Although these women did not interpret these behaviours as signs of love, intimacy or commitment, they did not want their friends to harshly judge or blame their boyfriends or fathers - and by implication, them. This fear of judgement and insensitivity resulted in women not talking openly with their friends about their experiences of abusive boyfriends or fathers.

Therefore, by protecting and defending their father and boyfriend, Claudia and Felicia (Extracts 2 and 3 respectively) are able to protect and defend their own preferred identities; by doing so they can retain a sense of control and dignity. In Extract 3, Felicia highlights another aspect of self-protection, and answers her own question of "why" she doesn't tell about her experience of IPV (lines 17-20). Aside from not wanting either her or her boyfriend to be judged, Felicia has a fearful anticipation of her

boyfriend's reaction, retaliation and punishment. This is an important point – despite having ended their relationships, two women in this study felt constantly hypervigilant, paranoid and fearful of their boyfriends' ongoing influence in their lives.

Similar to the findings of Eisikovits and colleagues (1998), after they had left their relationships, women in this study were more readily able and willing to redefine their partners' characteristics as predominantly negative, focus on those characteristics, and treat them as governing factors. By doing so, they prepared themselves and others to turn away from their partners.

Only one male participant – 23 year old Xabiso - came to tell about his experience of intimate partner violence; this African man was the only participant in the study who was currently still in his abusive relationship at the time of the interview. All of the women with personal experience of partner violence had left their relationships – for many this ending was recent. In line with the above discussion, Xabiso, (whose story is illustrated in more detail later in this chapter), at times actively defended and explained his girlfriend's behaviour, and was clearly not yet ready to turn himself - or myself as listener - away from her. In fact, he at times seemed more intent on defending his girlfriend's reputation than his own.

The thematic finding of young men and women talking about their intimate relationships in ways that protect their reputations and identities supports – and adds to - the limited existing literature in this regard. In addition, the women in this study revealed that they make similar attempts at protecting the reputations of their fathers who are abusive to their mother – in efforts to control how their friends will perceive them. These findings also underscore a major methodological underpinning of this study, i.e. that young adults will tell (or not tell) their stories of partner violence in ways that take into account their self-presentation goals and concerns. Therefore, a narrative analytical perspective requires researchers to attend to 'why' and 'how' young adults talk about their lived experience.

#### ***4.1.4. Making sense of intimate partner violence***

An interesting finding that emerged from this study relates to the ways in which young adults made sense of intimate partner violence. Only three female participants, and two

male participants – all without personal experiences of IPV – spoke about partner violence in the context of broader power dynamics located in social, cultural and economic practices (such as gender – and socio-economic- inequality). In contrast, the other 19 participants, 11 of who had first-hand experiences of partner violence, focused on the particular feelings, choices and individual qualities and identities of the people in the abusive relationship. This suggests that despite the external cultural and structural constraints faced by South African women in particular, many young adults prefer to make sense of intimate partner violence from an individualistic perspective.

The above finding is both in line with - and in contradiction to - some findings in the current literature. In a study with young men and women (with a mean age of 17 years – in relative close proximity to the mean age of 20.7 years in this study), Chung (2005) similarly found that young people perceive and understand partner violence from an individualistic point of view. The danger of this ‘individualistic discourse’ (Chung, 2005) is that it encourages young women (and men) to understand violence and abuse as a problem of the individuals involved, resulting in abused adults having to present themselves as powerful individuals with agency under all circumstances. Certainly, in their interactions with me, it seemed important for many female participants in this study that they present themselves as agentic, resilient and empowered women, who have been able to survive and make sense of their individual experiences of IPV.

In contrast to the individualistic discourse identified by Chung (2005) and my study, previous ethnographic interviews with South African women found that interviewees cited patriarchy, women’s rights and position in the society, economic deprivation, apartheid and unemployment as major reasons for abuse of women in society (Dangor, Hoff, & Scott, 1998). Of note, these women had a mean age of 30 years, whereas the female participants in my study had a mean age of 20.4 years – suggesting that age (and stage of life) play a significant role in how women make meaning of their perceptions and experiences of intimate partner violence. Compared to their older counterparts, the female participants in my study were possibly less exposed to – or had fewer experiences with - gender-based violence or discrimination in the workplace, and none of them were dealing with the challenges and responsibilities of finding and maintaining employment. Furthermore, their experiences of violence within their intimate relationships did not yet extend into a domestic space, i.e. only one woman in this study was living with her boyfriend at the time of the abuse. Nevertheless, it’s noteworthy that

the majority of young adults in this study did not include external demands or obstacles in their meaning-making of intimate partner violence.

Three of the five participants - who made sense of IPV within the context of South Africa's history of patriarchy and gender inequality - were African. It's possible that whilst growing up these young adults were more aware of overt oppressive practices operating within their patriarchal cultures. One African woman commented on partner violence being "so much more in the open" in African communities, and wondered whether White communities did "a very good job of hiding it".

Pumla, a 20 year old woman, was the only participant in this study who had never been in an intimate relationship. She presented herself as a young African woman who was very conscious and concerned about the prevalence and impact of IPV in her community. Pumla made sense of partner violence within the context of patriarchy, male domination and the general oppression and exploitation of women. She positioned herself as a strong, intelligent and independent woman who was able to resist and oppose the influence of young men and relationships in her efforts to feel safe, and to achieve personal success. Pumla was mindful of how abusive men could "distort and destroy" a woman's sense of self, and personality, and felt adamant that she wouldn't allow a man to negatively impact on her personal achievements.

A 20 year old White woman, Maxine, positioned herself as a young woman living in South Africa – a country in which all women should feel "very strongly" about the issue of intimate partner violence. Maxine reflected on how her father was clearly the "dominant" head of the household, the "breadwinner" and the decision-maker, and she was mindful of how this tradition of male domination in her family had informed her current views on gender relationships. Maxine positioned herself as "a student" and "a woman" who strived to be independent, educated and empowered. Given her experience of her parents' marriage, Maxine was very mindful of the issue of personal power in her own relationships, as well as the role and position of women in society in general.

Thandi, a 20 year old African woman, expressed a belief that uneducated and poor men were more likely to be violent than their educated and privileged counterparts. Here the men's violence was understood as attempts to demonstrate and express masculinity,

power and love. However, the results from this study show that women's experiences of IPV transcended cultural, racial, educational and socio-economic lines.

Although only five participants spoke about partner violence in the context of external social, cultural and structural factors, the fact that none of them had personal experience of partner violence offers an additional perspective on this theme. It suggests that a young person's level of personal experience with intimate partner violence will to some extent determine the level of abstraction he/she uses in explaining and making meaning of it. Young adults with no experience of partner violence do not need to focus on identity issues, and are therefore more able and/or likely to take distal factors into account when constructing abstract explanations for the problem. In contrast, it can be expected that young people with personal experience of partner violence will more readily focus on immediate identity issues and other proximal factors in making sense of the problem.

The above argument ties in well with another finding from this study - relating to the extent to which men and women grappled or struggled with how to understand the problem of intimate partner violence. Across interviews, male and female participants with first- or second-hand experience with IPV found it more difficult to make sense of the problem of IPV than those without such experience. This finding is consistent with the arguments made in the literature by Berns and Schweingruber (2007), and is further illustrated by the following two extracts from my interview with Feroza, a 20 year old Coloured girl, who had experienced severe physical abuse in her intimate relationship.

Extract 4: Feroza

1 Feroza [...] I can know all these things, and I feel that I know all these  
 2 things, but then why am I still attached? Why can't I get away from  
 3 it? I know that if I had to have a future with him that my life will be  
 4 hell, it would be hell, it's just, how do you get away from it, it's  
 5 horrible, it's absolutely terrible. It doesn't even help me that much to  
 6 know how all of this is wrong, I mean, I feel as if I know a pretty  
 7 good amount of this now, I mean, I've even gone to the internet,  
 8 I've read up about it, I've done all sorts of things 'cause it's gone on  
 9 so long, and it's wrong, but still, I'm still attached, and it's strange, I  
 10 mean it must be strange for another person, I can imagine that it's  
 11 strange for somebody else to understand why you feel attached to  
 12 somebody who has done this to you (.) maybe you can tell me,  
 13 I don't know, something that I leave at the back of my mind,  
 14 because I can't spend all day thinking about it, you know, I have

15 other things to do.

Extract 5: Feroza

- 1 Adele Do you think a lot of people struggle to understand this?  
 2 Feroza I think so, everyone that I've come into contact with struggles to  
 3 understand how this can happen, it doesn't happen to people like us  
 4 Adele And then they judge you, like 'how come you stayed'?  
 5 Feroza Yeah, it's a lot of judgment, they can't understand, and I do get it  
 6 from their side, I wouldn't understand, you know, it takes a lot to  
 7 understand something like that - it takes either being through it or  
 8 someone extremely close to you being abused and you witnessing it,  
 9 nobody can just understand it, it must be very hard to understand, I  
 10 can't think what anybody, it's always strange to think what the next  
 11 person would think, they would not understand. I wouldn't have  
 12 understood myself if I had to completely take myself out of this, I  
 13 would not have understood how this can be happening here, you  
 14 know, why is this happening, you don't have to take it, just go (.)  
 15 it's not that easy.

In Extract 4, Feroza makes an important point - that she can “feel” (lines 1,6) and “know” (lines 1,3,6) all about IPV – she knows that her “life will be hell” (lines 3-4) if she stays with her boyfriend, and that his abuse towards her is “wrong” (lines 6,9). Therefore, her ongoing feeling of attachment to her boyfriend is not as a result of her being numb or ignorant. With regards emotion, Feroza’s choice of words, “hell” (line 4), “terrible” (line 5) and “horrible” (line 5), convey her feelings of fear, misery, anguish and agony, and allude to the power her boyfriend has to torment and terrorise her. With regards knowledge: aside from her personal experience with IPV, Feroza has also engaged with other “discursive environments” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001) such as sources from the internet – all in an attempt to make meaning of her current situation. Feroza comments that she knows “a pretty good amount of this now” (lines 6-7) – indicating that she has most probably explored - and drawn from - multiple institutional discourses in her construction of her problem with IPV. Her participation in the research interview is another resource and opportunity that Feroza hopes might help her understand the complexity of her lived experience; this is signalled by her suggesting that perhaps I can tell her how to understand her experience (line 12).

The fact that Feroza continues to feel unable to make sense of her attachment to her boyfriend in the context of his violence, despite these knowledges, suggests trouble for her identity work. Here ‘troubled identity’ refers to the interpretive process that Feroza must go through in identifying or understanding her self as part of the social problem of

IPV (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Feroza comments on the all-consuming and demanding nature of this interpretive work – it takes up physical and emotional space, and time and energy to “spend all day thinking about it” (line 14). This also conveys the power of IPV to absorb, engross and devour one’s “mind” (line 13), and Feroza must start attending to - and preoccupying herself with - “other things” (line 15).

As argued by Berns and Schweingruber (2007), in attempting to construct their narratives of IPV, people with first-hand or second-hand experience with IPV have a harder time making sense of the problem than those without such experience. Given her personal experience with IPV, it seems that Feroza feels overwhelmed and challenged by the complexity of trying to understand the strangeness of her experience (lines 9). Similarly, Feroza believes that other people would also find it “strange” (lines 11-12) that she would be attached to a man who has abused her.

In Extract 5, Feroza returns to this issue of understanding IPV, and highlights that only a person with first- or second-hand experience can attempt to understand “how this can be happening here” (lines 6-8,13). Here Feroza argues that people without the experience of IPV cannot have the necessary insight and knowledge with which to make sense of, and understand, it. She adds that she herself would not have been able to understand if she had to completely remove herself from the experience (lines 11-13). Feroza’s focus on the issue of understanding IPV, and her repetitive claim that others won’t be able to understand, underscores the centrality of this issue. The phrase “it takes a lot to understand” (lines 6-7) hints at how much emotional and cognitive work Feroza has had to do in order to make meaning of her experience.

Feroza’s talk demonstrates how people with first-hand experience of abuse resist “simple understandings” for why victims stay, and find it more complicated to construct a narrative that “makes sense” (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). Ironically, it’s likely that others without first-hand or second-hand experience of IPV would be less overwhelmed by the task of making sense of Feroza’s experience of IPV and her ongoing attachment to her boyfriend, and might find it less “strange” (Extract 4, lines 9,10,11; Extract 5, line 10) than Feroza assumes they would. Given that interpretive work is easier and less ambiguous when the self is not involved, these people are likely to draw on “common knowledge” (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007) and explanations as

to why victims of IPV stay in their abusive relationships. This is illustrated by the following two extracts from interviews with two male respondents.

Although Kobus and Darren, both 21 year old White men, have experienced certain levels of emotional abuse and/or neglect in their parental homes, and both describe struggling with trust in intimate relationships, neither have had an experience of IPV. From this position of non-victim, these two men are able to construct less complicated understandings of IPV.

Extract 6: Kobus

- 1 Adele How do you make sense of an abusive relationship?  
 2 Kobus If one starts to abuse someone and that other person does not put  
 3 down those boundaries and not, or doesn't leave or anything, that is  
 4 an acceptance of what is going on and it might be, I think, victims of  
 5 abuse, um, or survivors - definitely they've changed it - um, I  
 6 think that when one gets abused, it's an acceptance of, of, of how  
 7 other people think you are, and I think it's got a lot to do with low  
 8 self-esteem, it's got a lot to do with low self-worth, not just self-  
 9 esteem, but worth (.) so it's definitely got to do with self-worth  
 10 [...] it becomes, it's a choice, it becomes – no, no, it was a choice,  
 11 but it becomes an enslavement. They would have left a long  
 12 time ago, and I'm sure, you walk around with a black eye every,  
 13 month and you or she is saying like, "You've got to leave", you know  
 14 and they're saying, 'yeah, I know', and they don't, that just obviously  
 15 is an issue.

Extract 7: Darren

- 1 Darren Well, okay, theory, this is all hypothetical, but, um, a lot of the time I  
 2 find that women doubt themselves, they doubt, they doubt their  
 3 strength, their personal strength, their character, so, I was speaking  
 4 about my one friend earlier, she's complex about her weight, she's  
 5 complex about not looking good and so when she finds a guy who  
 6 she's been with for two years, that offers you some sort of routine,  
 7 ritual, comfort, and like if you have something for long, no matter  
 8 how good or bad it is, you begin to feel comfortable because you rely  
 9 on it, it doesn't change [...] so a lot of the time I think that the girls in  
 10 these relationships, during the process, like, I think they begin with  
 11 low self esteem or egos and, and, or some sort of problem where they  
 12 have a complex about something, or they just don't feel like they are  
 13 deserving of a relationship [...] and then, I think the partner, because  
 14 he's abusive, and he makes them feel worse, then he weakens their  
 15 condition even more, so then they can't leave him, because then they  
 16 don't think they'll find anyone else and they always, I believe, they're  
 17 probably almost even feel thankful that he still stays with them,



18 because they feel so low and undeserving [...]

Kobus and Darren easily answer my question: they present similar “common knowledge” about women in abusive relationships (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007) – indicating their exposure to formula stories (Loseke, 2001) or simplified institutional talk about IPV. In Extract 6, Kobus refers to popular discourse when he comments on how ‘they’ changed the term from “victims” (line 4) to “survivors” (line 5).

Similar to the participants in Berns and Schweingruber’s study (2007), Kobus and Darren explain many reasons for why women stay in abusive relationships – focusing on concepts such as entrapment and learned helplessness; they describe women as lacking personal qualities (such as self-esteem, self-worth and ego strength) that might otherwise allow them to stop or prevent the abuse; and they focus on the victim significantly more than on the abuser (e.g. victims fail to put down boundaries; victims doubt themselves; victims accept the abuse; victims struggle with personal problems and complexes).

Given that Kobus and Darren have no personal involvement in the problem of IPV, they are not challenged by the complexity of trying to integrate a narrative of their identity with a narrative of IPV. Consequently, these extracts illustrate that Kobus and Darren are not overwhelmed by the task of constructing an abstract and suppositional “theory” of IPV (Extract 7, line 1, “it’s all hypothetical”). Kobus’s use of the word “definitely” (Extract 6, line 9) indicates the ease and certainty with which he approaches his argument.

Despite the absence of first-hand experience, Kobus and Darren offer a lot of ‘understanding’ about IPV, as well as clear-cut and typified descriptions of the problem. In his explanation, Darren relies heavily on his female friend’s experience, and focuses his understanding of IPV on women as victims. He does not include the possibility of abused men in his talk of abusive relationships. Kobus (Extract 6) on the other hand speaks of “victims” (line 4) or “survivors” (line 5) more generally, and uses “you” (lines 7,12,13) and “one” (lines 2,6) as the subject of experience.

Darren’s understanding (Extract 7) that women start to feel “comfortable” (line 8) by the routine, security and reliability of an abusive relationship (lines 5-9) is likely to be problematic for women who have experienced IPV. Not only is the suggestion that an

abusive relationship can be comforting inherently problematic, but the simplified argument is in stark contrast to the complexity and ambiguity of an abusive intimate relationship.

As with the study by Berns and Schweingruber (2007), these results caution against IPV being accepted as a “known issue” that is easily “understood” (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007). It is important that young women and men hear how female and male victims understand the problem of IPV from a position of first-hand experience. Victims of IPV should be allowed to tell their rich and ‘messy’ stories – these complex frames for understanding can help inform and shape solutions that are creative, encompassing and flexible. In addition, the results from this study illustrate the value of a narrative interview in offering young adults a resource and opportunity for exploring, interpreting and making meaning of their understandings and/or experiences of partner violence.

#### ***4.1.5. Constructing a dual understanding of abusive partners/fathers***

Similar to findings described in my literature review (Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000; Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999), the women in this study constructed dual understandings of their abusive boyfriends. A new finding was that women who told stories of their father’s abuse towards their mother also constructed dual understandings of their abusive fathers. By constructing a division between the good and the bad, between who he ‘really’ was and what he did, the women were able to separate the violence from the ‘real’ and good men their boyfriends and/or fathers were. Nevertheless, women actively struggled to reconcile both the loving and abusive aspects of their partners and/or fathers. The following extracts offer a more detailed illustration of the duality of the participants’ constructions and meaning-making, and highlight the difficulty many of them experience in maintaining the dichotomous nature of their constructions.

In her interview, Claudia, a 20 year old White woman, spoke about her father’s severe verbal abuse towards the family, and commented on her family’s silence and avoidance of this issue. In this next extract, Claudia tells of a friend who was in a “potentially horrible relationship”.

Extract 8: Claudia

- 1 Claudia [...] she wouldn't, she never really told anyone what was really  
 2 happening until after everything happened, and then she said just like  
 3 how cruel he was to her, um, but (.) like he's not a bad person because  
 4 I'm his friend as well, so it was very hard for me to try and like get  
 5 this part that Cindy was telling me about - with him, like how do I  
 6 mix the two because with me he was like fine, but I suppose it's the  
 7 same with my dad, like when we took my dad out, he was perfect,  
 8 like he was the most fantastic person when we went out (.)  
 9 [...]
- 10 Claudia [...] and the thing with Mark, Cindy's boyfriend, I know, like he's had  
 11 a very disturbed childhood and the way - his father had like three  
 12 wives - and the way his father treats women is disgusting, and, um, I  
 13 don't know, I like, I still find it quite difficult to get him and this  
 14 horrible monster that Cindy talks about together, but Cindy still loves  
 15 him that's the thing, is that even though he's a horrible monster to  
 16 her, she still loves him, so there's quite a lot of goodness in him and  
 17 it's quite difficult because it's like love and power and abuse all get  
 18 mixed up together, you don't actually know where one stops and the  
 19 other begins  
 20 [...]
- 21 It's so hard in you own mind to clarify it, like I didn't - I can't see my  
 22 dad as an emotional abuser because he's a really divine man and it's  
 23 really hard to hold both of those things in my head at the same time

In Extract 8, Claudia's talk clearly illustrates her dual understanding of Cindy's boyfriend: on the one hand, her friend has indicated that Mark, her boyfriend, is a "cruel" (line 3) and "horrible monster" (lines 14,15); on the other hand, and as his friend, Claudia believes that Mark has "a lot of goodness in him" (line 16) and is "not a bad person" (3). The stark contrast between these binary descriptions of good and evil is striking: despite being described by Cindy as an inhumane and wicked beast who knowingly and willingly causes her pain and distress, Claudia suggests that Mark has a lot of kindness, integrity and moral virtue.

Similarly, Claudia struggles to "clarify" (line 21) and reconcile the dichotomy between her father as the "perfect" (line 7), "fantastic" (line 8) and "divine man" (line 22) that he is, and her father as "an emotional abuser" (line 22). Several of Claudia's phrases capture the two-fold, binal nature of her constructions of Mark and her father: "how do I mix the two" (lines 5-6); "it's really hard to hold both of those things in my head at the same time" (lines 22-23); and, "I still find it quite difficult to get him and this horrible monster that Cindy talks about together" (lines 13-14). Claudia's phrase, "you don't actually know where one stops and the other begins" (lines 18-19) suggests that at some stage these dual and dichotomous understandings and experiences can become blurred,

entangled, confused and “mixed up together” (line 18) – making it difficult to differentiate between love and abuse (lines 17-18).

By attributing Mark’s violence to factors beyond his control (Wood, 2001b), for example, his “disturbed childhood” (line 11) and his father’s “disgusting” behaviour towards women (line 12), Claudia does not hold him responsible for his violence. This implies that the violence can be dissociated from Mark as the man who enacts it – thus enabling Claudia to continue to appreciate the “goodness” (line 16) in him; by maintaining this distinction Claudia is able to continue her friendship with him (line 4, “I’m his friend as well).

#### Extract 9: Sheetal

Sheetal, a 20 year old Indian student, spoke about her father’s severe and frequent physical abuse towards her mother when he was under the influence of alcohol.

- 1 Sheetal [...] I think the most impact was the physical abuse and it was under  
 2 the influence of alcohol, um, but it was quite frequent and, um, (.)  
 3 like to the point where she bled, like there was blood, I don’t know,  
 4 but I know some of it, like a story my mother would say, or, you  
 5 know, something like that, and, um, it was quite severe, but she never  
 6 actually ended up in hospital, but, um, it was quite severe, and he  
 7 would be, he would repent afterwards, he’d clean up and bathe her  
 8 and, you know, and the difficult thing was, he, um, my father was  
 9 very close to his children, like he, um, he was being a father and he  
 10 was very affectionate towards us, and, um, he basically liked to look  
 11 after us, and everything was about us, and he was a doctor himself, so  
 12 he was respected and he was a good doctor and people knew him and,  
 13 you know, he was all those things, and the family, my father’s family,  
 14 like idolised him, so whatever he did wasn’t really wrong [...]  
 15 Adele And today - does your family speak about your father’s abuse?  
 16 Sheetal Um, no, not really, it’s very um (.) confusing because, and it’s very  
 17 (.) I don’t know, we haven’t really addressed anything, because of all  
 18 these feelings, um, that are mixed up, because we love my father so  
 19 much and he was so good to us, and then the other side, he wasn’t  
 20 good to her [...] so like we don’t know where our - where to - begin  
 21 even like thinking about it (.)  
 22 [...]  
 23 There were all these heroic things about him, and then, as as his  
 24 kids, all of us went medically, and he he wanted us to, and we knew  
 25 that, so like, we’re even following in his path so, it’s difficult to, like  
 26 he’s kind of like our mentor, but then he had this horrible part that  
 27 changed all of our lives because of it and, ja, it’s difficult in that way  
 28 because we’re trying to follow the good path but the bad path is there  
 29 too (.)

As a young girl, and now as a young woman, Sheetal (Extract 9) struggles to make sense of a dual construction of her father – as ‘the abuser’ who made her mother bleed, and as the “affectionate” (line 10) and responsible ‘father’ who adored, nurtured and actively cared for his children. Similarly to Claudia, Sheetal’s use of the term “mixed up” (line 22) conveys how confused and confounded she feels in attempting to address her father’s violence, and to make sense of the two different sides to him.

Furthermore, her father was a “good doctor” (line 12) who was revered, “idolised” (line 14) and respected by his family, children and community. Sheetal describes her father as a “heroic” man (line 23) who was a “mentor” (line 26) to his children - both of whom followed in his footsteps and were taking the “good path” (line 28) to becoming medical doctors. Sheetal therefore considered her father to be a wise and trusted counsellor, teacher and role-model – a man noted for his special character and career achievements. Despite her obvious love and admiration for her father, Sheetal is weary of how the “horrible part” (line 26) of her father significantly impacted on – and altered – their lives, and is conscious of having to avoid the wrong and “bad path” (line 28) paved by him.

#### Extract 10: Feroza

In her interview, Feroza, a 20 year old Coloured girl, came to tell about her experience with emotional, as well as severe physical abuse in her relationship with her boyfriend; the physical abuse ranged from hand twisting, to neck choking and head banging.

- |   |        |  |
|---|--------|--|
| 1 | Adele  | Was the emotional abuse visible to others in public situations?          |
| 2 | Feroza | No, it was always private, he was always, everybody, I think that is     |
| 3 |        | something - everybody seems to think he’s this perfect person, I mean    |
| 4 |        | girls are always telling me, ‘I’m so lucky’, and I’m thinking,           |
| 5 |        | ‘if you only knew, if you only knew’. So he portrayed this, he is a      |
| 6 |        | nice person - beside that - I am not going to say that he’s not, he is a |
| 7 |        | very kind person, he’s (.) you know there’s lots of nice things about    |
| 8 |        | him, but that’s all he shows to anybody else, I saw every side,          |
| 9 |        | the other side of it.  |

In Extract 10, Feroza speaks about the glaring discrepancy between how others perceived her boyfriend, and how she knew him. She implies that others considered him to be “this perfect person” (line 3) because he represented and “portrayed” (line 5)

himself in this manner; thus, others were deceived and fooled by his performance. The power of this false representation is evident in other girls expressing their envious feelings with regards Feroza's good luck and fortune (line 4) in having this perfect man. Given the convincing nature of the deception, these girls would be shocked if they had to know what Feroza's boyfriend was really like, i.e. they cannot know how unlucky and ill-fated Feroza actually is.

Feroza's talk here highlights the secretive and hidden nature of intimate partner violence. In contrast to others who only saw the kind and nice side of her boyfriend, Feroza had knowledge and experience of "the other side" to him (line 9) – the inhumane and ugly side. Here Feroza has to construct a dual understanding of her boyfriend – that he can be both a perfect 'Prince Charming', as well as a malicious and evil 'beast'. By acknowledging that, "beside" the violence (line 6), her boyfriend is indeed a nice and kind person (lines 5-7), Feroza resists constructing him as holistically abusive.

Feroza's use of the adjective "kind" (line 7) in describing her boyfriend is quite startling to me. Given his severe physical abusiveness it's difficult to imagine that she can experience him as a gentle, considerate and benevolent person. However, I'm reminded that women's lived realities of intimate partner violence can lead them to tell stories that might seem implausible to others. Feroza's lived experience of violence includes her boyfriend that illogically acts in both loving and hateful ways (Loseke, 2001). At the level of personal experience, Feroza might find it difficult to see herself as an example of the typical 'battered woman', or victim of IPV. Therefore - as pointed out by Loseke (2001) - the complex lived experience of women can be one where love and hate, caring and violence are perceived as coexisting, and where it is difficult to assign unambiguous theoretical meanings to violence, to selves, and to partners.

#### Extract 11: Feroza

- |   |        |  |
|---|--------|--|
| 1 | Feroza | It's like, I don't understand, 'this wasn't how we started out?', you    |
| 2 |        | know, it makes me, sometimes I just, I look at him and I can't even      |
| 3 |        | remember that he was 'that' person or that we were there, so happy,      |
| 4 |        | you know, 17 and in love, 17, 18, 19 (.) it's complete opposite stories, |
| 5 |        | you can't actually believe that it's one story, and everyone else will   |
| 6 |        | believe it's the same story, um, I always have people telling me, 'you   |

7           guys look so happy’, and it’s so strange, how can they not see, you  
8           know, ‘are you just ignoring it?’ or are we doing a good job of not  
9           showing it.

In Extract 11, Feroza reveals her difficulty in maintaining this dual understanding of her boyfriend – there are times when she struggles to remember the person he was prior to the abuse (lines 2-3). She is confronted with the radical contrast and contradiction inherent in the “complete opposite stories” (line 4) of her relationship – the story of being young, “so happy” (line 3) and “in love” (line 4) does not fit in alongside the story of violence.

The duality of her experience is illustrated by Feroza not being able to consider her story with her boyfriend as one story – where the happy love story transforms into a fearful and violent story; rather, Feroza understands it as two separate stories – with different characters and plot developments. However, Feroza comments that it’s only the good, happy story that is seen by - or shown to - others (lines 7-9). She hints that others might consciously choose not to see the other side of the story (line 8) – perhaps because they wouldn’t be able to fully believe or bear the pain and ugliness of it. In addition, her and her boyfriend might be doing a “good job” of performing and presenting a one-sided version of their relationship (lines 8-9).

#### Extract 12: Feroza

1     Adele    So when you were in this relationship, how did you make sense of it?  
2     Feroza   You can’t make sense of it, it’s just, it comes so far away that  
3            you keep, I kept thinking, um, the two years before, he’s obviously  
4            still there, that two years it’s gotta mean something, I didn’t, it wasn’t  
5            nothing, he’s got to still be that person, you know, we still have to  
6            have that relationship, so maybe this is just ‘a bad patch’,  
7            which it’s not, it’s, it never ends I think, possibly for some people but  
8            I think mostly it doesn’t end, so he’ll always be that way with you  
9            if you two have a relationship, but yeah, I didn’t cope, I still don’t  
10          cope with it, because I’m still, I still, I’m very much still attached  
11          to him, and, I don’t know if it’s in love or love but I’m very much  
12          still wanting ‘the two years’ as a future, even though that’s not gonna  
13          happen, but, because I can’t get away from that, everything is still  
14          stuck. I don’t know if it’s a young or an old thing but I feel I can’t get  
15          away from it all, yet, at all.

Extract 12 illustrates how a dual understanding of a partner has implications for how a woman makes sense of her violent relationship. Feroza refers to the violent-free nature

of her boyfriend and their relationship in the two years prior to his abuse. Given her experiences, Feroza has had to construct a dual understanding of her boyfriend – as the non-violent person that he was, and still has to be (line 5), and the uncontrolled violent partner that he has become. She argues that surely the memory and history of the first two years must hold value, purpose and meaning (line 4, “it’s gotta mean something”; line 4-5, “it wasn’t nothing”). Feroza doesn’t complete her sentence in line 4 (“I didn’t”), but it seems that she was going to say that she didn’t imagine it – it was real. It seems that the longing and belief that her boyfriend has “got to still be that person” (line 5) sustained her through the periods of violence (line 3, “I kept thinking”).

By remembering the times prior to the abuse, Feroza is able to temporarily hold onto the good image of her boyfriend, and thereby remain close to the part of him she can accept. Feroza’s metaphoric description of the violent relationship as a “bad patch” (line 6) reflects the belief that the violence represents a temporary period of poor luck and that it will come to an end; this meaning-making possibly increased Feroza’s ability to survive experiences that otherwise would have been unbearable (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999). With the hope that the abuse will stop, Feroza was able to satisfy her need for relatedness (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999) and initially chose to stay in the relationship despite her boyfriend’s violence.

During her interview, Feroza describes often feeling responsible for her boyfriend’s violence. By attributing the violence to herself, and seeing the violence as a “bad patch”, Feroza could be drawing on a narrative of ‘dark romance’ (Wood, 2001b). This script claims that it is normal for men to have ‘bad spells’, and thus normal for romantic relationships to be hurtful to women (Wood, 2001b). Feroza was constantly blamed for doing things that elicited her boyfriend’s violence – suggesting that the onus was on her to ensure that her boyfriend was not driven to violence (Towns & Adams, 2000).

However, in her attempts to respond to the incoherence of partner violence, Feroza shifts her ways of narrating her experience. In lines 7 to 9 Feroza reveals that she intuitively knows that her boyfriend’s violence is not temporary or circumstantial, but that it will be a constant and permanent feature of who he is, and how he behaves in relation to her. By using the third person pronoun, (lines 8-9, “he’ll always be that way with you if you two have a relationship”), Feroza generalises her understanding and



interpretation to all abusive relationships – possibly drawing on other sources of information about this issue (e.g. from the media, peers, culture etc.)

In lines 9-10, Feroza immediately brings the focus back to her, and states that in actual fact she didn't cope, and is still not coping "with it". It's not clear what exactly she's referring to here - that she didn't cope with the nature and impact of the violence, or that she doesn't cope with knowing and accepting that her boyfriend is not going to change – thereby requiring her to end the relationship.

At the time of the interview, Feroza's relationship with her boyfriend had recently de-escalated after a serious physical assault ("the last bad event"), and they had started "spending less and less time together". From her description of it, it did sound as though her boyfriend's movement away from her was part of a manipulation tactic – to punish her ("because he had problems with me"). However, Feroza also claims some ownership and empowerment in this regard, ("I must have started to realise what he was doing").

In lines 10 to 14 Feroza illustrates that ending the relationship is not that simple – she "still" has strong feelings that bind and attach her to her boyfriend. Despite the violence she experienced, Feroza expresses a strong sense of investment in - and yearning for - the future dreams and hopes of "the two years" (line 12). Therefore, the violence not only destroys the current relationship in the here-and-now, but also threatens all her expectations of what she imagines the relationship could have been in the future. By giving up on her future dreams, Feroza has to face how much she has indeed lost to the violence.

Her phrase, "I'm not sure if it's in love or love" (line 11) is interesting in several ways. It can indicate that Feroza is questioning whether her affection for - and attachment to - her boyfriend is an expression of love for him in particular, or whether it's suggestive of her being in love with the idea and the fantasy of him. It can also convey Feroza's attempts to understand why, despite the violence, she is still desiring "the two years as a future" (line 12) – it can be that she feels a profound, long-lasting and mature love for her boyfriend, thereby wanting to continue the initial love relationship; it can be because she is in a temporary state of being seduced by - and enamoured with - the dream of a happy future and a romantic ending to her troubled story. Feroza's comment in line 14

(“I don’t know if it’s a young or an old thing”) can also be analysed in this context: is it young love or old love that is guiding her feelings? Is it immature infatuation, or wise affection and loyalty, that is making her feel so attached and committed to her dream? Another reading of this phrase links to Feroza questioning her inability to move away from the fantasy of a future with her boyfriend: it can refer to her being young and lacking the knowledge, insight and experience in how to do so, or it can refer to her having invested and sacrificed too much time and self in this relationship for her to now abandon it.

Feroza’s feelings of attachment are binding her to her boyfriend and making her feel trapped and “stuck” (line 14) – unable to shift or move away. Ironically, she can’t move forward into the future which she so desires; instead, she is held captive by the memories and history of the “two years” – an experience that belongs in the past, and which holds no scope for temporal progression and development.

In the following extract, Kobus, a 21 year old White male participant, tells about a man who was in a mental health clinic at the same time as his mother, and speaks about the misleading façade of the “nice guy”.

Extract 13: Kobus

1 Kobus She was in there with a person who, he beats his family, he just, but  
 2 he’s such a nice guy, which is an interesting thing, because, I mean, I  
 3 met him and he’s such a gentleman, he’s such a gentleman to my  
 4 mother and whatever and we were having a discussion about that,  
 5 about him and what a nice man he is and everything, he’s very, he  
 6 says all the right things and he’s happy, but it’s a complete façade,  
 7 because she told me what he actually did and I was so surprised (.)  
 8 and it’s that, you know, that splitting, believe me, he just splits like  
 9 that

Kobus’s talk (Extract 13) reveals that young men are also shocked and astonished when faced with the unexpected deception – that a “nice” (lines 2,5) man, a “gentleman” (line 3), is in actual fact an abusive man. Through his experience, Kobus realises that men who are abusive can also seem considerate, sensitive, amiable, kind, proper and well-mannered. Kobus talks of the “façade” (line 6) – of being misled by an illusion or a misrepresentation that is intended to conceal the unpleasant truth. With his use of the word “splitting” (line 8) Kobus also implies a possible dual understanding of the man in

this story – where the violent and abusive part of the man is separated from his pleasant, gentlemanly and non-violent side. The interview with this male participant suggests that when unexpectedly confronted with a person’s abusive nature – especially a person of whom they’ve had some prior knowledge - both men and women struggle to reconcile the duality of their perceptions and understandings.

In summary, this theme has highlighted that young adults – in particular women with personal experiences of abuse - construct dichotomous understandings of their abusive boyfriends and/or fathers. Their success in maintaining this duality has direct implications for their ongoing relationships with their fathers, as well as their meaning-making of their past abusive relationships with their boyfriends.

These findings contribute to understandings of the complexity and ambiguity of women’s experiences of violence, by underscoring the difficulties women face in differentiating between – and reconciling – both the loving and abusive aspects of their partners and/or fathers. Furthermore, the narrative analytical approach of my study was invaluable in capturing how women used language to construct dual understandings, and how they struggled with the entanglements of these binary constructions.

#### ***4.1.6. Questioning intent***

As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants in this study linked their experiences of emotional and/or physical abuse to their partners’ attempts to gain dominance and control in the relationship. This same meaning-making applied to women who spoke about their father’s abuse towards their mother. However, this understanding of the instrumental motivation behind partner violence was overshadowed by ambivalence. Women (and one man) in this study with first-hand experiences of IPV consciously grappled with the issue of intent – questioning to what extent the abuse from their ex-boyfriends or fathers held purpose and design. The answer to this question informed the meaning and significance they attached to their stories of IPV, and held major implications for their ongoing relationships with their ex-partners and/or fathers. Certainly, the issue of intentionality significantly influenced how women/men understood the violence within the context of their intimate relationships, and how they chose to respond to it.

The existing literature makes references to the issue of intentionality in several ways. As I noted in the introductory chapter, many definitions of violence in general associate the element of intentionality with the act of violence, irrespective of its outcome. In addition, in cases where women have used violence against their male partner, it has been shown that women's violence often differed in terms of intention (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Therefore, it has been argued that violent acts must be studied within the context of actions and intentions associated with the event and its aftermath (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Aside from the intentions behind their violent actions, men's responses to their use of violence have also been demonstrated to be purposeful, dynamic and intentional (Cavanagh et al., 2001).

The issues of intent, responsibility and blame have been addressed in the literature in an attempt to consider questions of causality (Flinck, Astedt-Kurki, & Paavilainen, 2008; Cavanagh et al., 2001; Eisikovits, Goldblatt, & Winstok, 1999; Viano & Bograd, 1994; Senchak & Leonard, 1993). It has been explained that men and women use attributions and accounts as a means to deflect blame from self and partner so that the violent event can change its meaning and become understandable and perhaps even tolerable (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a). Certainly, by not feeling convinced of the intentionality of the abusive behaviour of their fathers and/or boyfriends, participants in this study could better tolerate their experiences and the implications it held for them.

The importance of considering 'intent' was furthermore identified in focus group research with male and female Canadian high school students (Sears et al., 2006). That specific study found that boys described behaviours as abusive if the intent was negative, whereas girls tended to describe behaviours as abusive if the impact was negative. In contrast, the findings from this study revealed that women (and one man) with first-hand experiences of IPV carefully considered the issue of intent, and that violent behaviours that were deemed to be intentional were experienced as abusive - despite its impact. Furthermore, in some cases where the impact was clearly negative - in that a partner's behaviour was emotionally and/or physically harmful - the abusiveness of the behaviour was called into question if the intentionality behind it was ambiguous.

Extract 14: Priya

1 Priya [...] Like my dad - I definitely hold him responsible, he knew  
 2 what he was doing, he knew that it was wrong, he knew he shouldn't  
 3 be doing it, but he did it anyway (.) apart from that, I think he did it  
 4 to show her who had power, it was like, 'this is what's expected of  
 5 you and if you don't produce that then these are the consequences, so  
 6 deal with them because you're not doing what you're supposed to'  
 7 [...] I don't know about intentionally though, I mean, surely it was, it  
 8 was never, you know, he never sat and planned it out - well, if I say  
 9 this, then she'll feel this way and then I can do that - it was probably  
 10 just the way he was, I don't know, I've tried to understand it but I  
 11 think it's so beyond me, it's like something that's just, it makes no  
 12 sense if you think about it (.)

Priya is a 20 year old Indian girl whose father physically and emotionally abused her mother for many years. Her mother and father got divorced two years prior to this interview, and this is the first time that Priya has spoken about her experience.

With her repetition of "he knew" (lines 1,2), Priya indicates that her father had knowledge, understanding and awareness of the fact and circumstance of his abusive and wrongful (line 2) behaviour. Priya describes her father's abuse as a specific attempt to gain power and control in the relationship, and as a means of warning and punishing her mother for not meeting his expectations (lines 3-6). Despite this understanding, Priya reveals her ambivalence and confusion in lines 7-10; she struggles to imagine her father "intentionally" (line 7) sitting down and carefully and explicitly planning his abuse. She therefore concludes that her father's abuse was most probably a result of his innate character and personality – suggesting that not only did he not cunningly and maliciously plan his abuse, but that he also could not be held responsible for controlling or preventing it. Priya remarks on how difficult it is to comprehend and make meaning of why and how her father implemented his abuse – this understanding is not within her reach.

#### Extract 15: Thandi

1 Thandi I've never been afraid that he'll hit me (.) it was more of controlling  
 2 my movements and my thoughts and my feelings and things like  
 3 that, more than hitting me, and to this day I think he didn't even  
 4 know what he (.) it's hard to sort of like see someone in a bad light  
 5 when you know that they don't know any better, or they don't (.) he

6 doesn't know that he did anything wrong type of thing. To him it  
 7 was just – Thandi is doing this, she's busy with these guys - I  
 8 don't know how it gets twisted in his mind - and therefore I always  
 9 have to constantly remind her of this and that and pull this up (.) but  
 10 I don't think he ever sat down and maliciously thought – okay, I'm  
 11 going to do this to make her feel this way, it just so happened that  
 12 with his behaviour it led to me feeling this way about myself, and  
 13 this and that happening – because (.) I just (.) I don't know (.)  
 14 looking back at his personality, he's in fact a sweet person when he's  
 15 not behaving like a jealous idiot (.) and if I could alter one thing  
 16 about him, it would just be that, and I'd probably even let him date  
 17 my daughter if I could just change that one thing (.) but beyond that  
 18 one problem that he has of being a psycho, he's fine, and it's so sad  
 19 because I think he'll go through his entire life doing it

Thandi, a 20 year old African girl, participated in both an individual interview and a female focus group discussion, and told about her experiences with a very jealous, possessive and “controlling” boyfriend.

In Extract 15, Thandi's talk illustrates how a dual understanding of her boyfriend has direct implications for how she judges the intentionality of his emotional control. By suggesting that her boyfriend was in fact naïve, unaware and ignorant of the nature and impact of his behaviour, Thandi can continue to regard him as “a sweet person” (line 14) who did not deliberately and maliciously calculate how to control or hurt her – thereby altering the meaning and significance of his behaviour and their relationship. Thandi excuses her boyfriend from any accountability, responsibility or negative judgement, and instead opts to construct him as a foolish, stupid and distrustful man (line 15), as well as a crazy and insane man (“psycho”, line 18); therefore his personality and behaviour are considered to be beyond his control, and to incidentally have resulted in Thandi feeling a particular way about herself (line 12).

By constructing him as a neurotic and insane man, whose thoughts get distorted and “twisted in his mind” (line 8), Thandi perceives her boyfriend to be in a constant struggle for self-control and sanity. Therefore, his emotional control and abuse are seen as the result of failure in this struggle. Furthermore, by attributing his behaviour to a state of craziness - it needs no explanation (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999). By maintaining a split in her perception of her boyfriend, Thandi can preserve a positive image of him - as a dear man with whom she would even trust her daughter – on the condition that his madness can stop (lines 15-16).

## Extract 16: Feroza

1 Feroza Is there intent when they do that, I mean, I don't know, it's, that I  
 2 would like to know, if I had a few questions to ask God - that's what I  
 3 would ask - put me inside his head so I can see if there is intent to do  
 4 that to me or if it's just a natural automatic process, that's what I'd  
 5 like to know, that bothers me.

Later in her interview, Feroza recalled an interaction with her boyfriend that led to a severe physical assault, and where her boyfriend's intent and purpose to harm her was obvious to her. She explained that this knowledge was "hurtful" since it clearly called into question her boyfriend's love for her. This suggests that by believing that his abuse was not intentional, Feroza could maintain an illusion of control regarding the violence – for example, that it was just "a bad patch" (Extract 12, line 6) or a "natural automatic" (Extract 16, line 4) reaction – and that in actual fact her boyfriend does love her and would never mean to hurt her.

Later in the interview Feroza commented that the injuries from her boyfriend's physical abuse were always seen and felt by her, but invisible to others - "He made a point never to punch me or have me bleed anywhere"; here she also implied that her boyfriend was cunning and mindful enough to determine where to target his abuse (in an attempt to conceal and disguise it from others). Therefore, in contrast to it being an "automatic process" (Extract 16, line 4), her boyfriend's violence was acted out consciously and with volition.

In summary, the findings from this study contribute an important understanding, namely, that young adults with personal experiences of partner violence are likely to consciously grapple with the central issue of intent. Here the possibility of negative intent seems more important to young adults than the possibility of negative impact. Attribution of intent directly informed how young adults in this study evaluated the abusiveness of the behaviour exhibited by their boyfriends and/or fathers. In addition, accepting the fact that their partners and/or fathers were deliberately and wilfully abusive had significant implications for how these women perceived themselves, their partners/fathers and their past relationships with these men. The results from this study show that an acknowledgement of the intent of abuse adds meaning and significance to the violence - which otherwise can be segregated from the 'real' and good love relationship - and places the entire relationship into an ambiguous light.

#### 4.1.7. *Women doubting their sense of reality*

Several women with first-hand experiences of partner violence spoke about how their boyfriends' constant criticism and blame resulted in them doubting and questioning their own realities and meaning-making of situations. Over time, women started to believe what their boyfriends told them, and had less power over how they defined both the relationship and themselves.

##### Extract 17: Felicia

1 Felicia Like he'd say that I flirt with every guy I meet, and I knew I didn't do  
2 it and afterwards I'm like, 'did I?', and then I actually stayed away  
3 from other guys. Like he'd say, I cheated, and then I think, I didn't do  
4 it, but maybe I did something to lead him on, or, and that was another  
5 thing, about the abuse - like the sexual part of it, he'd always say, 'no,  
6 but it was your fault, you led me on to do it, you wanted it', and then  
7 I start thinking, did I really want it? did I really push him?, did I  
8 really lead him on? And like, but like, I know that I didn't but he's  
9 saying that I did, and he's said it so many times that I must have done  
10 it, you know (.)

The accusations from her boyfriend have resulted in Felicia questioning – not only her behaviour – but also the intentions and desires informing that behaviour. The above extract (Extract 15) illustrates the constant tension and vacillation between her knowledge of - her self and - any given situation (lines 1-2, “I knew I didn't do it”; lines 3-4, “and then I think, I didn't do it”; line 8, “I know that I didn't”), and her feelings of doubt and uncertainty. Her repetition of the question “did I really?” (lines 7,8) communicates Felicia's confusion and hesitation.

##### Extract 18: Feroza

1 Feroza [...] I suddenly, I mean, I don't wear skirts anymore, as an example,  
2 because I feel why would I wear a skirt? Let's just say a medium  
3 skirt, because it's wrong, I suddenly think that it's wrong, and even  
4 now, long afterwards, not long afterwards, but even now,



5 I still think it's wrong - I don't wanna wear a skirt, you know?  
 6 He's made me believe these things that weren't there in my own head  
 7 before. So, it's big, it's something you can't analyse by yourself, or  
 8 think about by yourself, and there's not very many people to talk to  
 9 about it, you know?

Feroza highlights how the control and influence of her boyfriend lingers even after the relationship has ended; she still continues to believe (as previously defined by her boyfriend) that wearing a skirt is inappropriate or problematic (Extract 18, line 3, "because it's wrong"). Feroza's example is a powerful one: what might be considered by some as a rather minor, uncomplicated and commonplace decision (to wear a skirt or not), evokes a complex internal dialogue for Feroza, in which the voice of her boyfriend is still compelling in swaying her judgement.

Similar to descriptions in the literature (Cavanagh, 2003; Lempert, 1997a), Feroza's boyfriend exerted power and control - not only by using emotional and physical abuse - but also by imposing his understanding of what was happening in the relationship. For instance, he accused Feroza of being dirty, immoral and promiscuous in her interactions with other men. Over time, Feroza has come to "believe these things" (line 6), and ask questions about herself. Certainly, in modifying her actions in the relationship to placate her boyfriend, Feroza seemingly supported his definition and perception of her, and consequently altered her own understanding of self (Lempert, 1997a). Consequently, Feroza has accepted and introjected ideas about herself that did not previously exist in her own mind and reality. The phrase "things that weren't there in my own head before" (line 6-7) conveys a sense that her boyfriend planted/inserted ideas in Feroza's mind that would not ordinarily have been pre-established. The phrase also suggests that, prior to the abuse, Feroza would not have judged her boyfriend's notions or constructions as reasonable or rational.

Feroza acknowledges that this situation is a matter of major concern, importance and gravity (line 7, "it's big"). She conveys the obscurity and complexity of trying to discover the essential features or meaning of this dynamic, and suggests that it is too overwhelming and difficult to do so alone (line 7, "it's something you can't analyse by yourself").

Certainly, during many ambiguous scenarios during the relationship, Feroza was required to interpret and explain her boyfriend's violent behaviour without input from

outsiders. By continuously having to doubt and deny her own understandings of what was happening in the relationship, Feroza possibly lost confidence in her ability to define her own reality (Lempert, 1997a). It appears that Feroza now intuitively knows that she needs to move beyond her “own head” (line 6), and talk to - and think with – others in order to make sense of what has happened to her. However, Feroza again alerts to the absence of people she could talk to in this regard (line 8-9); perhaps also suggesting that there aren’t many people whom she feels would be able to respectfully engage with this dilemma.

As discussed in the literature by Cavanagh and colleagues (2001) - as well as being mediated through experience - meaning is reflected in language. The failure to articulate the language of violence will inevitably restrict the meaning of violent experiences and potentially deny reality. Through his refusal to name or speak about his violence – and his focus on speaking about Feroza’s behaviour instead – her boyfriend exercised a powerful strategy of control. Certainly, Feroza had less power in relation to the naming and meaning-making of the violence in her relationship, to the point of reducing her experiences to ‘unreality’ (Cavanagh et al., 2001).

As discussed in the introduction, the act of telling her story can provide a woman with an opportunity to name her experience and reality, which in turn can lead to a sense of personal empowerment (Riessman, 2001). Given the nature of the theme discussed here – it seems that the narrative interview assisted the female participants to reclaim their clarity of voice, and to again consider their understandings of their reality. By putting these experiences of ‘unreality’ (Cavanagh et al., 2001) into words, women were encouraged to interpret them. The findings therefore suggest that a narrative interview can help women articulate and explore their reality, and assist them to make sense of the breach between their understandings and those imposed on them by their abusive partners.

#### ***4.1.8. Women as managers and rescuers of bad relationships***

Two concepts that have been described in existing literature were identified in the narratives of a few women in this study. Firstly, four women used ‘emotion work’ (Frith et al., 1998) - a feminine strength and attribute – to manage their emotionally abusive

intimate relationships (Chung, 2005). These women described their boyfriends as emotionally immature and less competent communicators, or understood their boyfriends to be damaged or vulnerable due to past hardships; this was used to explain why boyfriends behaved in unacceptable and irrational ways in relationships. By taking on the responsibility of being the emotional ‘managers’ of the relationship, young women attempted to control their boyfriend’s abuse, and were inevitably implicated in the failure of these relationships. This also resulted in women being complicit in minimising their partners’ responsibility for unacceptable behaviour.

Similarly to the South African couples in Boonzaier’s study (2008), these four women used the language of psychology to explain their boyfriend’s abusive behaviour; their boyfriend’s childhood history of violence or past dysfunctional relationships were presented as precursors to his violent behaviour. The fact that these women were also ‘Psychology’ students possibly strengthened their tendency to use these explanations.

A second overlapping concept was that three of these four women were seduced by the romantic fantasy of transforming and mending their abusive boyfriend’s vulnerable nature through providing a perfect- (Towns & Adams, 2000; Rosen, 1996), and nurturing-love. One woman spoke about how her boyfriend’s family often thanked her for being a “positive influence” on him. These women narrated themselves as capable of comforting – and caring for – their troubled partners, and for being committed to providing the love and nurturance that will help these men. All three women later critically commented on their retrospective insight into the problematic nature of this particular romantic fantasy – and consciously vowed not to be seduced by it again in future relationships.

It’s interesting to note that these three women positioned themselves – and impressed – as very independent, confident and extroverted women; however, these characteristics were only reclaimed after they had all chosen to leave their emotionally abusive boyfriends. All three were studying far away from home, and had become involved in these abusive relationships in their first year of university. Their sudden isolation from family and friends could therefore have been a vulnerable or stressful life circumstance for these women (Few & Rosen, 2005; Jackson, 2001; Rosen, 1996), placing them in a position of becoming seduced by romantic fantasies and relying on their relationships for comfort (Jackson, 2001). Similar to the findings from Rosen’s (1996) study with

young women, these three participants became locked into fused and intense relationships with their boyfriends, and spent the majority of their time and energy devoted to the relationship. These women described relationships in which their needs - including safety and security - and self-interests became subsumed by their relationships.

Importantly, the eight other female participants in this study with first-hand experience of IPV were not regulated by the positions created by this perfect-love discourse, and had come to believe that they could not change their partners. In contrast to the findings of Wood (2001b), these women resisted – or were disillusioned with - Western culture’s primary gender narrative that expects that women should care for and please their partners under any and all circumstances. These female participants critically reflected on the problematic implications and consequences of remaining in destructive relationships, staying silent about their boyfriend’s abuse, or attempting to change their partners. Moreover, after having left their abusive relationships, these women acknowledged the importance of maintaining a sense of identity and connectedness without taking on the role of nurturing and rescuing future intimate partners.

These findings suggest that young women in South Africa – and to some extent their cultural communities – are starting to question and challenge constructions of romantic love, and disengaging from romantic invocations of love. For instance, only one woman in this study explicitly spoke about her longing for “romance” in future relationships, and her desire to be loved and cared for. It would thus seem that young women are becoming aware of the pitfalls of traditional heterosexual gender relations and romantic love discourses, and are starting to acknowledge the importance of negotiating equal relationships. Women (and men) must therefore be supported in their efforts to develop new cultural scripts that enable them to successfully achieve equality in future intimate relationships.

#### ***4.1.9. The importance and intensity of intimate relationships***

Importantly, interviews with both male and female respondents strongly illustrated that intimate relationships are important and relevant to young adults and their current identity projects. Very few participants could think of a male or female counterpart who

was currently not in a relationship. The men and women - spoke about both the pressure and desire young adults feel to be in committed intimate relationships, and - regulated themselves according to the societal expectations of the appropriate developmental trajectory of coupledness, marriage and children. Similar to descriptions in existing literature (Few & Rosen, 2005), both the men and women in this study were at a stage in their lives where they wanted a relationship to accentuate their social, educational and/or professional pursuits.

Men and women who were single placed themselves “in the minority” – they described their peers as actively concerned about searching for an intimate partner. Men and women believed that being in a committed intimate relationship offered status at university, and conveyed a sense of maturity and wisdom. High school years were characterised by behavioural experimentation, freedom and “partying”, whereas the transition to university demanded moderation, responsibility and interpersonal commitment.

Extract 19: Andre

One 21 year old male participant, Andre, pointed out the young age at which men and women are entering into serious and committed relationships.

1 Andre [...] It's so weird, like my parents' generation, and for my folks, they  
 2 almost sound confused, like they say, 'why do you kids take it so  
 3 seriously', like, 'see a few people and just relax and enjoy life',  
 4 but it really feels like in our generation people like really want to get  
 5 that relationship down, like it's a prerequisite or something, people  
 6 seem to be a lot more serious about relationships.

Andre suggests that older generations are bewildered and perplexed by how earnest, sober and overly concerned the “kids” (line 2) of today are about intimate relationships. It seems that young adults make a conscious and concerted effort to attend to the essential requirement of an intimate relationship. It's not clear what the relationship is a “prerequisite” (line 5) for – possibly for successful identity projects. Some male participants reflected on their current age and developmental stage: they acknowledged the importance of making sense of relationship issues now, in preparation for good future relationships. These men have started to think about establishing serious and committed relationships, and expressed their preferences and desires with regards future

partners. As described by Reynolds and colleagues (2007), the female participants in this study had certain expectations of the appropriate trajectory for their lives, and relied on the dominant narrative of courtship and coupledness. Importantly, the results from this study have shown that the same applies to young men, and that men also choose to position themselves in relation to this narrative.

Extract 20: Andre

1 Andre [...] the problem is not only that you get isolated, especially in an  
2 emotionally abusive relationship you're gonna get more isolated  
3 because that's what the other person ultimately wants, but it's not  
4 only that you're isolated in your relationships, but your friends are  
5 also in relationships that they're isolated in, so there's this huge gulf  
6 between people, it's kind of scary.

Both male and female participants described the intensity and consuming nature of intimate relationships – young adults spend an enormous amount of time in these relationships, and can end up being physically and socially isolated by - and dependent on – them. Therefore, both men and women can become separated and insulated in unhealthy relationships at a very young age. This divide and gap (Extract 20, line 5, “huge gulf”) in connectedness and understanding can result in young adults missing out on opportunities for feedback from - and interaction with - their peers and family. As suggested by Andre in Extract 20, this estrangement can have unfortunate, and even frightening and dangerous (line 6, “it's kind of scary”) consequences for young men and women.

As explained by the male participants, the sudden break-up of these relationships can feel daunting, and can result in people feeling “shell-shocked” and disconnected from others; this can have a devastating impact on the young person's current identity and career development. Given the discomfort and alienation of being single and alone, male participants observed their peers initiating new relationships very quickly - or indiscriminately returning to previous partners.

After his experience of an emotionally controlling relationship, Andre spoke about how being single had enabled him to rediscover himself – he could again enjoy his own company, be more “self-interested”, and was conscious of not compromising more than he should. He referred to the romantic ideal and expectation amongst young people - especially men - that they must sacrifice for their partner - ‘suffering’ indicated that you

care. Andre's talk suggested that some men could be concerned that an expression of too much self-interest would be misjudged by others as politically and culturally inappropriate.

In summary, the findings from this study contribute a new and important understanding – that young men and women pursue intimate relationships in a very determined and conscious manner, and that the earnest commitment to these relationships are central to their attempts to present themselves as mature, responsible and successful adults. However, in doing so, young men and women are vulnerable to becoming isolated in – and consumed by - very intense intimate relationships, to the exclusion of social engagement with peers and family. Certainly, one of the reasons for this focus on initiating and maintaining intimate relationships is the influence of the dominant narrative of courtship and coupledness.

***4.1.10. The timing of relationships – Implications of intimate partner violence for identity construction***

The results from this study underscore the importance of considering the time and place of violent (and non-violent) intimate relationships in the lives of young adults, and the implications of this timing for their identity work. With regards to the participants' personal experiences with intimate partner violence - these relationships started either in the last two years of school (Grade 11 or 12), or the first or second year at university, and lasted for a period between 15 months and 4 years. Therefore these relationships were formal and long-lasting, and occurred at a crucial stage of personal and social development. The women in this study were involved and isolated in intense and abusive relationships at a time of transition, growth and change. One woman spoke about her transition from home to university, and noted the expectation that her long-standing boyfriend would provide the necessary emotional support, security and safety. Certainly, finishing high-school, making the transition to university, and adapting successfully to the demands of their new academic and social environment are stressful life-circumstance events for most young adults. To start a relationship with an abusive boyfriend in this period of 'situational vulnerability' (Few & Rosen, 2005) or destabilisation can have major consequences for young adults.

According to Erikson's theory of identity development (1959), young adults are faced with the tasks of developing a sense of identity, independence and intimacy – the exploration of which is significantly influenced by the interaction with – and feedback from – close relationships. Women in this study were confined in very controlling and manipulative relationships at a time when they needed to start exploring and developing a sense of self and intimacy in relationships.

As found elsewhere in the literature (Tolman et al., 2003), a few women from lower socio-economic backgrounds commented on how – during high school - boyfriends were viewed in part as a commodity that provided certain resources which the girls wanted or needed (e.g. access to a car, gifts, financial support). This resulted in adolescent girls feeling vulnerable and dependent on their boyfriends. However, at university it seems that an intimate relationship offers a more symbolic status and identity - indicating maturity, wisdom, pride and success. In this context, women with no or little dating experience felt their knowledges and ideas of relationships were disregarded by peers as uninformed, invalid and unhelpful.

In the next extract, female participants from the focus group (with a mean age of 20.3 years) spoke about the place of relationships in their identity projects, and the dangers and implications of becoming strongly invested in intimate (and unhealthy) relationships at such a young age.

Extract 21: Focus Group

- |    |        |   |
|----|--------|---|
| 1  | Debbie | Your names become one, you know what I mean                               |
| 2  | Thandi | You lose a part of yourself. I had my relationship in Grade 11, and       |
| 3  |        | how well do you really know yourself in Grade 11 or 12? Your              |
| 4  |        | identity's still developing and it's developing with another person in    |
| 5  |        | it. I'm in second year now, and it's so much time that I could have       |
| 6  |        | had to form a complete identity base - that was sort of like lost in the  |
| 7  |        | relationship, and now I need to rebuild everything slowly but surely,     |
| 8  |        | know what I want, know what I don't want, and what I won't put up         |
| 9  |        | with and everything (.)   |
| 10 | Elma   | Don't you think being in a relationship at high school adds to your       |
| 11 |        | identity?   |
| 12 | Thandi | It's not that you get lost in the person, it's that you develop           |
| 13 |        | differently than people who aren't in a relationship                      |
| 14 | Debbie | If I look at the girls who didn't have boyfriends, they're like, okay, it |
| 15 |        | sounds weird, but they're like studying medicine and being like           |
| 16 |        | lawyers and things like that. If you look at the girls who were more      |
| 17 |        | studious and didn't have space in their lives for boyfriends they got     |



- 18 further (.)  
 19 Christina I felt like the girls who had boyfriends were like very together people  
 20 Elma They're more mature  
 21 Christina And like I never had a long-term boyfriend at school, and I was  
 22 always like the wild one, and like, I was the one who was single, and  
 23 having fun and going out, and getting drunk, and when it came to  
 24 like getting out of school I was like ready to settle down. I thought  
 25 like, okay, I've had my fun, and I've been young, time to chill out,  
 26 time to get a relationship, time to be like grown-up, you know  
 27 Debbie One thing I always think of (.) my parents are divorced and one of  
 28 the things that always makes me want to make a relationship work, is  
 29 that my parents didn't. I always want to get married, having four or  
 30 five kids, be happy for ever – 'happily ever after' is my motto, and if  
 31 this is it, this is it. So pressure is like hectic.  
 32 [...]  
 33 Thandi [...]if I'm in love I'm supposed to be happy, it's supposed to be  
 34 about self-growth, it's supposed to be improving me - not pulling  
 35 me down, and I'm not supposed to change as a person -  
 36 my personality of the past 18 years now has changed - because I'm  
 37 dating this one person, and I should be growing and should not be  
 38 restricted (.)

Earlier in the focus group, Debbie had told of her experience with emotional and physical abuse from her boyfriend, and Thandi had spoken about her emotionally controlling relationship. Debbie and Thandi (lines 1-9,12-13) suggest that an intimate relationship at a young age can result in a loss of self and identity, and that it interferes with – and hampers – healthy and complete identity development. Thandi's use of the word "rebuild" (line 7) indicates that she must now rethink and undo the identity she developed in the relationship with her boyfriend, and reconstruct, reclaim and restore her sense of self.

In response to Debbie and Thandi, and from a position of non-victim, Elma offers a different perspective (lines 10-11,20) – that an intimate relationship at high school can add to identity, and indicate a certain readiness, capability and maturity. Christina also describes high school girls who have boyfriends as "very together people" – suggesting that they are mentally and emotionally stable, well-balanced, prudent and well-organised. In contrast to her unrestrained "wild" (line 22) days at high school, Christina felt it was important to become calm, composed and mature, and to apply herself to a serious and committed relationship as soon as she started university (lines 24-26). In contrast to Christina and Elma, Debbie points out that the girls who didn't have boyfriends at school turned out to be more studious, successful and ambitious – pursuing prestigious careers such as medicine and law (lines 14-18).

In lines 33-38 Thandi returns to the issue of identity development: she points out that instead of nurturing, supporting and enhancing her development and growth, she feels stunted, altered and confined by her relationship. Her abusive boyfriend singularly had the power to change her innate and longstanding personality and sense of self. Later in her individual interview, Thandi commented that it's a challenge for young adults to do identity work outside the context of an intimate relationship. Other women also noted the importance of relationships in providing companionship, and a sense of direction and purpose. Being in a committed relationship was also necessary for women to successfully perform feminine heterosexuality (Chung, 2005).

As illustrated by Debbie (lines 27-31), female participants whose parents were divorced noted the importance and pressure of maintaining a successful long-term relationship and/or marriage. Despite the failure of her parent's marriage, and the pain and distress of her recent abusive relationship, Debbie is still guided by the ideal and fantasy of the 'happily ever after' (line 30) relationship.

Extract 22: Feroza

- 1 Adele How did your friends respond when you told them about the abuse?  
 2 Feroza Absolutely shocked in two ways – in that he's that type of person and  
 3 that me, being the type of person they thought I was, would actually  
 4 sit and take it, that they could not understand, and I also can't  
 5 understand, because when I look back to being 15 or 14 I could never  
 6 think that 6 years on I would be this helpless person, I always thought  
 7 of myself as being a strong person, and very independent, and very  
 8 female driven, I always thought that I was that, but clearly I can't be  
 9 that much 'that', because then I wouldn't have this going on for so  
 10 long, you know, there are, there could be aspects of that there but I  
 11 can't be what I thought I was, it's impossible because then I wouldn't  
 12 have taken it. Thinking back, I just don't, I couldn't have seen myself  
 13 as someone to have this happen to me, have this happen to me is one  
 14 thing - just happening, but having let it happen for so long, that's  
 15 something you let happen, I let this happen for so long I didn't leave,  
 16 I let it go on and on because I just didn't want to leave because I  
 17 thought there were, you know, the attachment thing and all these  
 18 things there, and it's just, it's sad for me to think that I'm something  
 19 that I didn't think I would be, because we always had visions of  
 20 yourself, when you're younger, you know, you have visions of what  
 21 you're going to be, or what you are, you think you're something that  
 22 you're not, that's quite sad for me. So yeah other people also were  
 23 very shocked because they couldn't think that I would be someone to  
 24 take that, I don't seem very weak, you know, but I am very weak (.)

- 25           in that sense  
 26    Adele   Given your knowledge and experience now of the nature and  
 27           dynamics of abuse, is there a part of you that sees it in a different  
 28           way, where you don't see it as a personality-issue (that you are weak)  
 29           but where you think about the impact of having had to manage your  
 30           boyfriend's abuse?  
 31    Feroza   That's another way of looking at it, yes, no, I see what you're saying  
 32           but I just feel that I would have left then, I let it go on for a very long  
 33           time, and I am still not gone from it, and I feel that if I was (.) it must  
 34           have been a huge impact then from his side, you know, obviously,  
 35           I'm not, I don't, (sighs) aagh, I don't, I still think that I'm not a weak  
 36           person but to me it looks as if I'm a weak person, but as you say it  
 37           possibly is a huge impact coming from his side, it's not all me.

In Extract 22, Feroza speaks of the implications of her experience with abuse for her self-identity construction. She compares how she used to describe and understand herself as an adolescent with how she now thinks of herself as a young woman. She used to identify with being “strong” and “independent” (line 7) and “female driven” (line 8). This description suggests that she felt capable, in control, confident and empowered. It also implies that she was very aware of power differentials in relationships and that she was consciously motivated to succeed as an autonomous woman in the world. Looking back, Feroza now questions whether she could ever have been all that (lines 8-9); according to her, the abuse presents evidence to the contrary – it's not possible or plausible (line 11) that such a type of person would let themselves be abused. She now considers whether she is in fact “helpless” (line 6) and “weak” (line 24, 35-36), and is aware of how she may seem so to others (line 36). Therefore Feroza believes that her experience of abuse indicates that she is powerless, dependent, inadequate and perhaps even pitiable.

I think that Feroza makes a very powerful and emotive point: as a girl and young woman she could never have imagined being an ‘abused woman’ – she had dreams and aspirations of who she was, who she was becoming, and who she would be in the future (lines 20-21), and these never included the possibility of abuse. Feroza connects with the sadness of the story – her life turned out so very differently, and she has to grieve everything she has lost to the abuse.

Here Hydén (1999) makes a very important argument: although the all-consuming nature of living in an abusive relationship can threaten to become a woman's whole identity, a woman who has been abused by her partner *is* not ‘a battered woman’. Rather, she has ‘experienced’ living with a partner who is abusive, and violence must

not be considered to be the defining factor in her life. Feroza's talk reminds me that when she met her boyfriend who would later abuse her, "she was on her way somewhere and came from somewhere" (Hydén, 1999, p.467), and perhaps she needs help in recalling this. From this perspective, the identity of a 'battered woman' offers too limited a base on which to build a self-understanding.

In this extract Feroza struggles to be forgiving of herself. She seems to take on a position of 'self-blaming' (Hydén, 2005) from which she confronts herself with her own harsh criticism, and accuses herself of not having been strong enough to leave the relationship sooner. In her attempt to construct her self-identity, Feroza becomes caught between notions of victimisation, agency and responsibility (Leisenring, 2006).

Feroza's talk illustrates how the victim discourse can be both enabling and constraining in her process of self-representation and self-construction. Rather than claim a victim identity to convey that she has suffered wrongdoing and harm which she could not control, thus being deserving of sympathy and support, Feroza does so to highlight the notion that she is powerless, weak and culpable for her experiences. However, this is not a clear-cut process: throughout the interview Feroza draws simultaneously from multiple discourses in her identity work, and shifts her identity claims (Leisenring, 2006). It's therefore important to think why Feroza chooses to make this identity claim at this point in the interview, and in relation to me as interviewer. Feroza can be responding to me as the audience, and to her assumptions of my judgements and criticisms as to why she stayed in the relationship.

Feroza seems to be influenced by a 'victim empowerment' frame (Berns, 2004): this way of understanding victimisation is sympathetic to victims yet holds them responsible for solving the problem of violence in their lives. Feroza implies that she was "weak" in allowing the violence to continue for so long (line 15), and in not choosing to leave, thereby suggesting that she was not strong enough to take charge of her life. In her talk Feroza repeats three constructions: she's a certain 'type of person' (lines 3,6,12-13) that 'let the abuse happen' (lines 9-10,14-16,32), and who 'sat and took it' (lines 4,11-12,23-24). This focus thus centres attention on why she stayed in the abusive relationship and what she individually did or did not do to solve her problem with violence. Here Feroza expresses a belief that she was somehow partially responsible for her boyfriend's violence. This responsibility included not standing up to her boyfriend, not leaving the relationship, and having a 'victim frame of mind'.

My question to Feroza (lines 26-30) explicitly reveals my concern about her individualistic focus and positioning. Her perspective on ‘empowerment’ leaves out her boyfriend as the abuser and the social, cultural and structural context (Berns, 2004). Thus, by ‘failing’ to empower herself, Feroza opens herself up for blame for the ongoing abuse she experienced (Leisenring, 2006). In this particular interaction, Feroza considers and ponders my question, and acknowledges that it offers an alternative, and valid, perspective. Accordingly, she reveals a more layered internal evaluation – that although she thinks that she “looks” like a weak person (line 36), she still doesn’t think that of herself (lines 35-36).

As argued by Leisenring (2006), Feroza’s expressions of responsibility do not necessarily mean that she blames herself for the violence, but instead reflects current ‘victim empowerment’ discourses and represents her attempts to imply that she had some measure of control over her life (i.e. with the right frame of mind, she can have the power and control to stop the violence).

Extract 23: Feroza

- 1 Feroza [...] All that I live with is that I am one of those people that it’s  
 2 happened to, you know, why? I just can’t understand. I mean this, of  
 3 all things, you know, why didn’t I just get robbed or get hijacked,  
 4 why this? Would it have been worse to get hi-jacked, you know, or  
 5 was this worse? Because I could have maybe gotten over that, and not  
 6 being able to drive alone would be better than not being able to have  
 7 a new relationship.  
 8 Adele ‘This’ feels so much worse ...  
 9 Feroza Yeah, because I don’t know how to separate it from myself (.) I feel  
 10 this is the person that I am now, if it happens again - it’s a helpless  
 11 thing. (.)

In Extract 23, Feroza grapples with her misfortune – that “this” (line 2) particular trauma of IPV had to befall her. Feroza conveys how her experience of IPV will forever be a part of her story – she is now going to be marked and singled out as “one of those people” (line 1) that “it’s happened to” (line 1-2).

Feroza distinguishes between IPV and other forms of trauma, such as getting hijacked or robbed, and wonders which experience is worse (lines 3-7). Given the South African context, an experience with crime is no longer an unlikely event. However, although a robbing or hijacking can be very traumatic and have serious consequences for mental

health, it is usually a random and isolated incident that garners immediate response and sympathy from others. Similarly, the fear associated with a time-limited traumatic event is often temporary and acute (e.g. lines 5-6, the fear of driving alone), and a shared human experience (Hydén, 1999). In contrast, the experience of IPV is an enduring and chronic trauma that occurs with aim, reason and pattern within the context of an intimate relationship. The trauma and fear of IPV is therefore unique in many ways – it is long-lasting and chronic, and not shared by most people (e.g. lines 6-7, the fear of being in a relationship); it therefore presents more trouble for a person’s meaning-making and self-identity construction, and Feroza suggests that it’s harder to overcome (line 5).

Feroza’s talk alludes to the challenge of having to integrate the experience of IPV into how she thinks of herself as a person. Given the personal and intimate context in which the violence took place, Feroza struggles to separate herself from the trauma – suggesting that it says something about who she is as a person. She implies feeling marked as a victim - a woman who has been abused - and who will forever have to deal with the effects of that abuse on her life. Should she ever have another experience with IPV, it will indicate that she has a pathological orientation to being “helpless” (lines 10-11) in relationships – suggesting her knowledge and use of the ‘learned helplessness theory’ (Walker, 1979) in this regard.

In summary, this theme underscores the importance of considering the timing of violent relationships in young adults’ lives. Young women seek out - and become involved and isolated in - intense relationships at a critical time of transition, growth and change. However, in comparison to older women, young women have had fewer opportunities to build self-understanding and consolidate their identity projects. Therefore, a violent relationship at this stage of their lives can have critical implications for how young women experience and construct their sense of self.

The extract from the focus group (Extract 21) also illustrates the paradox of intimate relationships at a young age, i.e. an intimate partner can either add to – or take away from – a young woman’s identity development; an intimate relationship can either enhance – or hamper – self-growth. Generally, the findings from this study contribute an important perspective – that young adults do the majority of their identity work in the context of intimate relationships; therefore, the nature of these relationships is crucial.

Moreover, when faced with the intimate trauma of partner violence at this critical time in their lives – young women struggle to separate themselves from it.

Furthermore, (and linked to the previous theme of the importance of intimate relationships), young women expect that successful intimate relationships at a young age are indicative of emotional maturity, success and purposefulness. This means that women are not allowing themselves a lot of time for self-exploration outside the context of an intimate relationship.

Importantly, the young women in this study aspired to be empowered and capable women who were in control of their identity projects, and they reflected on the impact that their intimate relationships had in this regard.

#### ***4.1.11. Men who are abused – Implications for their assessment of competence***

As with their female counterparts, an experience of intimate partner violence will surely hold implications for how men manage their identity claims. Unfortunately, only one man with a personal experience of partner violence volunteered his participation in this study, and I am therefore left to wonder about possible interpretations for this. It can be that men possibly feel concerned about how others will judge and evaluate their stories of being abused. As illustrated by the one man who did speak about his experiences of being abused, it's likely that many men struggle with ambivalence and confusion in their attempts to make sense of their girlfriends' violence. Moreover, given that cultural scripts present partner violence as a predominantly female experience (Howard & Hollander, 1996), it must be difficult for men to present themselves as the 'abused' partner. Finally, some existing literature (Migliaccio, 2001) has suggested that experiences of partner violence can hold implications for a man's masculinity; therefore, men's silence about intimate partner violence could represent their attempts to prevent their masculinity from being challenged or criticised.

Xabiso, a 23 year old African man, was the only male participant who was experiencing physical abuse within his current intimate relationship. After a single incident of cheating on his girlfriend two years prior to the interview, his girlfriend had become physically abusive – this included punching, kicking and beating; she blamed Xabiso's betrayal for the onset of her abuse. Xabiso came to the interview expressing his desire to

make sense of what was occurring within his relationship, and to gain some insight about how “to move forward” with the relationship. Aside from his betrayal, Xabiso wondered whether his low self-esteem, diminished personal power in the relationship and limited social network might have contributed to his girlfriend’s aggression towards him (“having the mean side of her coming out”).

Extract 24: Xabiso

- 1 Xabiso The amazing thing for me is that I, I (.) I’ve never really been in an  
2 abusive relationship, um, I told a very dear old friend of mine about  
3 it, uhh, he sort of said, agh it’ll pass on, don’t fuff too much, um I told  
4 another classmate about a week ago, actually, um, I was kinda  
5 worried about how she’d react, um, but the the way I interpreted it is,  
6 she sort of disclosed some personal things to me as well, and that’s  
7 why I I felt comfortable to discuss things with her, uhh (.)
- 8 Adele And how did she react?
- 9 Xabiso She felt that my girlfriend was being unreasonable, she kind of felt  
10 my girlfriend should have let go of the issue a while ago, um, (.)
- 11 Adele Do you think your girlfriend is being unreasonable, and perhaps  
12 abusive towards you?
- 13 Xabiso I think she’s angry, and had felt betrayed, and (.) yes, I mean, I don’t  
14 think she should have started hitting me, I mean, it, it’s not that she  
15 uses violence to sort things out, it’s always about, she always hits me  
16 when somehow the 2004 issue comes up, so (.) it’s, I don’t know if  
17 it’s a power issue (.) maybe I identify with her too much because I’ve  
18 been, a similar thing has been done to me, when I was younger my  
19 aunt chased us out when my grandmother passed away, chased us out  
20 of the house, and it felt like a betrayal to me and my mom, so in a  
21 way I can identify with her, uhh, so, I don’t know, I don’t know,  
22 maybe it’s a forgiveness issue, but, yeah (.) I don’t (.) I don’t (.)
- 23 Adele It’s hard for you to talk about this...
- 24 Xabiso Yeah (.) yeah (.) I think that she should have stopped, but, uhh, but, I  
25 don’t (.) I don’t know (.)  
26 [...]I’ve been beaten, that’s the thing, so, okay, I don’t like being  
27 beaten, no one does, but she punches, kicks, she’s threatened to cut  
28 herself with a knife, she’d go into the kitchen sometimes, go grab a  
29 knife and would lock herself in the bathroom, um, uhh (.) yeah (.)
- 30 Adele That must be quite scary for you...
- 31 Xabiso Um, uh, she’s a real warm person, in terms of (.) yeah, she’ll hug,  
32 she’s really the person who’s there for me emotionally, yeah (.) and  
33 especially before 2004, she’s the person who’s really been there (.) I  
34 don’t have a lot of friends, um,
- 35 Adele [...] Is it difficult for you to think about this as abuse? Are you trying  
36 to make sense of this in a different way?
- 37 Xabiso Yeah, maybe I’m being, I’m just trying to be optimistic, you know,  
38 that things will work out, that if I contributed to the abuse coming out  
39 then I can do something again to stop it, you know, take her out more  
40 often (.) but maybe I need to be more positive as well, be more  
41 optimistic, believing that people can be kind and can be trusted (.)



Xabiso points out to me that this is the first time that he's been in an "abusive relationship" (line 2) – he alludes to feeling a mixture of confusion and astonishment at his predicament. Although he later finds it difficult to name his girlfriend's behaviour as abusive, he does start off by positioning it as such.

It's interesting to note the contrast in how Xabiso's male friend responded to his disclosure compared to a female classmate. His long-time and good friend dismissed the abuse – suggesting that Xabiso not trouble himself too much with this temporary phase in his relationship (line 3); the female classmate evaluated Xabiso's girlfriend's behaviour as inappropriate, excessive and irrational (lines 9-10).

It's possible that Xabiso's experience of being unambiguously affirmed and supported by this female classmate further encouraged and motivated him to participate in this interview. Nevertheless, similar to his worry about how his classmate would react (lines 4-5), Xabiso must have been equally concerned about how I would evaluate and respond to his story. Xabiso's talk throughout his entire interview was characterised by many pauses, stutterings and unfinished sentences – possibly indicating his hesitation, discomfort and difficulty in telling his "personal" story (line 6).

In my question to Xabiso in lines 11-12, I bring in his previous use of the word "abusive". His response (lines 13-22) reveals his ambivalence and struggle in making sense of his girlfriend's violence. On the one hand he is sensitive to - and can identify with - her feelings of anger and betrayal, and the difficulty in forgiving him for the hurt he has caused her; on the other hand, Xabiso wonders whether his girlfriend's violence is linked to a "power issue" (line 17). This would suggest that rather than it being an expression of hurt, the physical violence is functional and intentional – aimed at gaining power in the relationship. Xabiso's repetition of "I don't know" (line 16,21,25) and the pauses in the unfinished utterances of "I don't (.)" (lines 22,24-25), possibly indicate his uncertainty in how to interpret the situation, as well as his difficulty in talking to me about it – hence my reflection in line 23.

In lines 26-29 Xabiso elaborates on the nature of his girlfriend's "hitting" (line 13): the severity and impact of her force is also revealed by Xabiso's blunt statement "I've been beaten" (line 26) – this suggests that he has been struck repeatedly and violently. It's

noteworthy that Xabiso refrains from expressing a strong opposition and reaction to this violence, and rather offers a moderate and restrained response, “I don’t like being beaten” (lines 26-27). Perhaps this is part of his efforts to minimise the intensity of the violence, and to feel a sense of control in the situation.

Similarly, Xabiso’s response to my reflective statement (line 30, “that must be quite scary for you”) suggests that it’s not easy or comfortable for him to talk about feeling frightened. Instead, he chooses to tell me about other aspects of his girlfriend – that she can also be loving, emotionally supportive and physically affectionate (lines 31-33). A short while later in the interview I ask Xabiso whether he finds it difficult to think about his experience as abuse (lines 35-36). My question most likely reveals how I am choosing to interpret and make sense of Xabiso’s story. As discussed in the literature review, Enosh and Buchbinder (2005) consider the interactive construction of narrative styles in sensitive interviews, and focus on the process of negotiating the definition of a couple’s reality as transacted between interviewer and interviewee. Throughout my interview with Xabiso I was reminded of this issue of power relationships in interviews, and my power “to define the studied social reality” (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b, p.614).

I had to remain mindful of possibly conflicting agendas between myself and Xabiso: I wanted to name and explore his experience of his girlfriend’s abuse; he wanted to get closure and find a way of continuing with the relationship. Although we might have had different definitions of his relationship’s reality, I did find Xabiso to be receptive to my questions and willing to recollect events in more detail. Nevertheless, at several points in the interview I was conscious of a critical issue: rather than driving towards getting Xabiso to reveal the “hidden reality” (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b, p.613) of his relationship with his girlfriend, it was more important that I heard and tried to understand his own definitional and meaning-making processes.

It seems important to Xabiso that he try to have a more hopeful and assured outlook about his girlfriend and people in general (line 37). By believing that he has caused - or contributed to - his girlfriend’s abuse, he can feel a sense of control in being able to stop or change it (lines 38-39). By assuming responsibility for the abuse, and believing that he has the power to rebuild and maintain a successful relationship, Xabiso can start to repair the ‘strike to his masculinity’ (Migliaccio, 2001). Furthermore, Xabiso wants to

aspire to believe that goodness pervades reality, and that “people can be kind and can be trusted” (line 41). Later in the interview Xabiso also commented on the cultural expectation that he should start to settle down, and make a commitment for future marriage – therefore making him feel pressured to make this current relationship work.

Some of the male participants in this study explained IPV as a result of inequality in a patriarchal society – understanding IPV as a predominantly ‘female’ experience (Howard & Hollander, 1996) involving a man’s power and domination over a woman. However, this stereotype of the violent male, or of men either being the victimisers or protectors (Migliaccio, 2001), does not make room for a story such as Xabiso’s – where the woman is violent, and the man is abused.

As discussed in the literature review, the characteristics of self-reliance, stoicism and control have been shown to be important in the development and maintenance of a man’s masculinity (Migliaccio, 2001). Xabiso’s experience of his girlfriend’s violence could have resulted in him feeling embarrassed, ashamed and silenced by the ‘failure’ of these masculine ideals. However, the fact that he chose to disclose the abuse to two friends and to myself is encouraging – and hopefully indicates an increased awareness that intimate partner violence can be both a female and male experience. Men who publicly disclose their experiences of IPV are often met with prejudice and scepticism (Migliaccio, 2001); it was therefore very important that Xabiso not feel scrutinised or judged by me during the interview, and that I communicated an openness and respect in listening to his story.

In the next extract from my interview with Xabiso, I asked Xabiso to reflect on the levels of personal power in his relationship with his girlfriend. Here, the extent of his feelings of control, power and competence in relation to his girlfriend directly link to his experience – and construction - of his masculinity.

Extract 25: Xabiso

- |   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Adele  | Do you feel that she has the most power now in the relationship?        |
| 2 | Xabiso | I do feel that she’s, I don’t know, more competent than me, yeah (.)    |
| 3 |        | uhh (.) yeah (.) and she’s strong, I mean she, she was raised by both   |
| 4 |        | her parents, um, her father was quite a strong figure, and I think she, |
| 5 |        | she took on more his personality, and her mother is very supportive, I  |
| 6 |        | mean, they sound like equals, it’s good (.) um, and my dad left when I  |

7 was an infant, um, I was raised by my mom and my grandmother, um,  
 8 and uhh, so there is a difference in our upbringing, I was, my parents  
 9 weren't married, so there are those issues, um, I grew up in the  
 10 township, she grew up in a suburb, I mean, uhh, yeah, so (.) I think  
 11 there are those differences between us, and, um, but yeah, I don't  
 12 know, I don't really have any regrets, I think my mom did her best, I  
 13 don't think it's her fault that my father didn't decide to marry her,  
 14 you know, I think her and my grandmother did their best, yeah (.) so  
 15 (.) and I've kind of told myself that when I've got kids I'll just try and  
 16 be a better parent, I'll try to be there for them, you know, uhh, so (.)  
 17 but she is more powerful (.)

My question to Xabiso in Extract 25 followed a discussion about how he felt unduly punished through his girlfriend's use of violence; he wondered whether she could address his infidelity (two years prior) in a different manner. My question also links back to earlier in the interview when Xabiso wondered whether his girlfriend's violence is a "power issue" (Extract 24, line 17).

Xabiso translates the issue of power as one of competence (Extract 25, line 2) – he suggests that his girlfriend is more capable, skilful and adept than him. Xabiso then qualifies his girlfriend's personal power by placing it in the context of family, culture and class: his girlfriend was raised by both her parents, whereas his parents weren't married and his father left when he was an infant; his girlfriend's father was a "strong figure" (line 4), whereas his absent father failed him; her family could afford to raise their children in a suburb, whereas he grew up in an impoverished township. Xabiso suggests that these 'differences' (line 8,11) and "issues" (line 9) have compromised his status, influence and power in relation to his girlfriend.

The importance and influence of a strong father figure is highlighted in Xabiso's talk. Xabiso makes the link between his girlfriend's strength and power and her father: he describes his girlfriend's father as a "strong figure" (line 4) – implying that he was powerful in his influence, authority and character; perhaps he was also aggressive and wilful. Furthermore, a "supportive" (line 5) mother who played an equal role in the parental relationship also contributed to his girlfriend's strength.

In contrast to his girlfriend, Xabiso did not have a strong male figure in his life – he was raised by two women, his mother and grandmother, who "did their best" (line 14) – suggesting that they made a concerted effort to manage and cope in the best way possible under the circumstances. This loss of a father figure can be profound for a

young African man whose culture values patrilineal descent, and the role and influence of the biological father. Xabiso therefore undertakes to be “a better parent” (line 16), a better man and father for his children one day.

In the last line, Xabiso ends off this part of his talk by summarising the central point of his narrative, and answering my initial question, that, yes, his girlfriend is “more powerful” (line 17) than he is.

The interview with Xabiso contributes two important perspectives to current understandings of men’s experiences of partner violence. Firstly, it suggests that maintaining successful intimate relationships is as important for men’s identity projects, as it is for those of women. Therefore, men will also assume responsibility for the partner violence in order to feel a sense of control and power in their ability to stop or prevent future abuse.

Secondly, an experience of partner violence can injure a man’s sense of personal power in intimate relationships, and can be interpreted by men as an overall lack of competence. This can be particularly shameful for African men – whose culture values the role, influence and contribution of strong male figures. Therefore, feeling less powerful, competent and capable than their female partners is likely to create ‘trouble’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001) for men’s identity work.

#### ***4.1.12. Re-evaluation of the relationship after leaving***

As shown in the literature review, there is ample literature focusing on women’s physical and emotional processes of leaving their abusive relationships. Interestingly, the process or decision to ultimately leave their relationship was not a major focus of any of the participants’ talk in this study. As illustrated in the following extract, several female participants explained that their relationships didn’t end because they felt “abused” (Extract 26, line 2), or after a dramatic turning point.

Extract 26: Focus Group

- |   |           |  |
|---|-----------|--|
| 1 | Christina | [...] in the end I didn’t break up with him because of the abuse, I      |
| 2 |           | didn’t, I really didn’t, I didn’t break up because I felt abused by him, |
| 3 |           | or because I felt (.) it was more than that, it was something else that  |

4                    just died on us  
 5        Debbie    I didn't break up with mine for the abuse. It got to a point where (.)  
 6                    like nothing had happened a week prior to breaking up with him,  
 7                    nothing, no fights or anything. I just came to a place where I was like  
 8                    - it's not good anymore

Some women broke up with boyfriends after they noted a decline in – and became disillusioned with - the overall emotional quality of the relationship; some women gradually started spending less time in their relationships, and over time became distracted by other responsibilities and relationships. Ironically, two women managed to end their relationships after a period of separation – this period was enforced by their boyfriends as a way of withdrawing their affection and punishing their girlfriends for unacceptable behaviour.

It is necessary to note that none of the participants in this study faced any significant external constraints in their attempts or decisions to leave their abusive partners. Rather, the ending of abusive relationships was primarily contingent on changes in how women subjectively felt about their partner, and how they judged the overall quality of their relationship (even if this did not include the explicit awareness of abuse at the time). Furthermore, the frequent ending of intimate relationships is a fairly common occurrence amongst young people at university; therefore, the women were able to end their relationships as a matter of course – without attracting too much public scrutiny. The findings therefore suggest that if young people have access to adequate external support and resources (e.g. structural, financial and emotional support from their families and/or friends), efforts to assist them to identify and leave abusive relationships should focus on their internal meaning-making processes.

Importantly, all of the female participants who came to tell about their personal experiences of IPV had already left their abusive relationships at the time of volunteering their participation in this research study, and thus came to tell retrospective stories of these relationships. Again, it makes me wonder about possible explanations for why women and men - currently in abusive relationships - did not choose to participate in this study. One possible reason links back to the intensity of these relationships – if young adults are literally consumed by these partnerships, it would be difficult, and perhaps dangerous, for them to find the time and space to break away from their partners and safely and confidentially participate in this type of research. Another reason relates to the context in which the women and men had to indicate their

willingness to participate in this study. The research announcements were made in large lecture rooms, and students had to return their completed or blank participation-slips prior to leaving the lecture hall. Although I collected all participation slips (in order to prevent students from being able to identify who, amongst each other, had volunteered their participation), it is possible that women and men in current abusive relationships were mindful and fearful about their partner finding out about their participation. This concern and fear would have been realistic given that for some of these students - their abusive partners and/or their partners' friends – might have been present in the same lecture room at the time of the announcement. Another explanation for why young men and women with personal experiences of partner violence did not choose to participate in this study links back to the theme of young adults protecting their reputations and identities. By choosing not to tell about their experiences of abuse, young women and men were likely making efforts to protect the reputations involved – that of their partner and their own. It's possible that a fear of judgement resulted in young adults not wanting to share their experiences – again indicating their interests in protecting their own preferred identities.

However, an important explanation for young adults not responding to the research study relates to the following critical finding: female participants who had been in emotionally abusive relationships only redefined their partners' behaviour as abusive after having ended their relationship. Therefore, it's possible that at the time of the research announcement and whilst in the relationships, many young women and men did not deem their relationships to be abusive.

During their abusive relationships female participants did at some point come to believe that the abuse was due to their actions or inactions. Their boyfriends constantly blamed their girlfriends for the abuse, and did not accept any responsibility or accountability for their behaviour. However, after having ended their relationships, these women started to acknowledge their boyfriend's wrongful behaviour, and to re-evaluate their understanding of it. Similar to the post-separation period described in the literature by Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2001), the women in this study engaged in a process of 'figuring it out', during which they consciously and proactively explored and expanded on the reasons for why the abuse happened and why they remained in the relationship as long as they did. During this moving on stage, these women stopped believing that they could have altered the relationship by being a better partner. They eventually came to an

understanding that there was no clear reason for their boyfriends' abuse, and that they could live with not knowing why the abuse happened; they also accepted that "there's nothing you can do to make this better".

Importantly, this transformation in understanding occurred only after women had left their emotionally abusive partners, and was not originally the reason why women made the decision to break up with their boyfriends. All of the women who had experienced emotional abuse spoke about their retrospective awareness and understanding that they were abused, i.e. these women realised they were abused after having ended their relationships. In contrast, the women who had experienced physical and sexual violence alongside emotional abuse realised they were abused whilst in the relationship – indicating that incidents of physical and/or sexual aggression are less ambiguous than the often subtle and insidious dynamic of emotional abuse.

The finding that women redefine their relationships as abusive, and describe an increased awareness of themselves as victims only after having left their abusive partner, is a perspective recently offered by Enander and Holmberg (2008). These authors, and the findings of this study, suggest that women do not leave because they realise they are abused, but rather, that women realise they were abused after having left. This perspective is different to that in the literature which has focused on the insights women develop whilst in their abusive relationships, and leading up to their decision to leave.

As described by Lempert (1997a), the young women's changing and evolving definitions of their relationship situations are the necessary conditions for their simultaneous and subsequent transformations of self; however, the young women in this study were only able to engage in this definitional process from a retrospective position of having ended their relationships. With the re-evaluation of their past relationships, women recognised the negative impact of the abuse on their well-being, and expressed powerful emotions ranging from loss, sadness, anger, and/or fear to relief, pride, exhilaration and empowerment. As found by Enander and Holmberg (2008), women described a process of 'breaking free' - during which they managed to disengage from the strong emotional bonds to their abusive male partners. It is here that women started to - reflect on the changes in their sense of self during and after their abusive



relationships, and - reclaim their relational voices of self-knowledge and connection with others.

Similar to the findings of Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2001), the women in this study – after having left their relationships - began to consider and take stock of themselves in new and different ways. They were more aware of their own personal power and control, they felt better able to care for themselves, and were more secure in who they were. They put their experiences of abuse in the context of other life events and new challenges, and consciously vowed to reinvest in their futures. Furthermore, the increased sense of control enabled these women to re-establish fractured relationships and to resume interpersonal relationships with some vigour (Horrill & Berman, 2004). Women were thankful for the extra time, freedom and energy they now had to forge a new image and new relationships.

#### ***4.1.13. The fear of post-separation***

The women in this study who had experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their past relationships faced particular challenges in their efforts to sustain a safe separation from their boyfriends. Although their partners did not necessarily actively seek out and harass them, the memories of the violent incidents were powerful reminders of the influence of their ex-boyfriends, as well as the dangers they once did - and could again – face. Two female participants who had experienced physical and/or sexual abuse spoke specifically about their pervasive feelings of fear, anxiety, paranoia and hypervigilance post-separation from their abusive boyfriends.

Extract 27: Feroza

1	Feroza	He still influences (.) I always think that he's around watching me,
2		that paranoia is just there, it will not go away, everything I do I think,
3		you know, like even now I am sitting here and looking at the shutters,
4		and thinking, 'does he know I'm here?', because he can't obviously
5		know that I've come to talk about this, he thinks no one knows, so (.)
6		because he always asks me, you know, 'have you spoken to
7		anybody about this', it's just so his secret won't come out, but I
8		mean, that paranoia of him watching me or me doing something
9		wrong, that hasn't left me, even, I think it gets worse everyday,
10		even though sometimes he isn't around for days (.)

Feroza (Extract 27) had experienced severe physical abuse, ranging from pushing, slapping and smacking, to being strangled and choked. In her interview, Feroza described a pervasive feeling of paranoia that her boyfriend was still closely watching and critically judging her behaviour. Prior to doing something, Feroza wondered what her boyfriend's comment or evaluation would have been – therefore he was still policing her thoughts and actions. She was also afraid that her boyfriend would know, or find out, about her participation in the research interview. The hidden and deceptive nature of his abuse (line 7, “his secret”) had taught her to be suspicious, distrustful and fearful of his actions and intentions. Therefore, the power, control and influence of her boyfriend did not end with the ending of the relationship. Hence, the challenges in sustaining the separation - and maintaining a life independent from - her boyfriend is an equally important part of Feroza's process of leaving the relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999).

During the rest of her interview, Feroza explained that the experience of abuse and survival still occupied a position of primacy in her life, not only intra-psychically but also interpersonally and socially. Consequently, Feroza had continued to isolate herself from the demands and possibilities of social interaction, and felt afraid of investing in new life events and challenges. Given the recent break-up of her relationship, Feroza expressed feeling completely overwhelmed by a general feeling of undifferentiated fear (Hydén, 1999); she struggled to see an opportunity to influence - or deal with – it, and felt unable to make herself feel safer. However, she was able to connect the source of her fear to her boyfriend, and the expectation is that her fear will become more differentiated and thus less overwhelming over time.

As suggested by Hydén (1999), women's narratives of fear can be read as narratives that say something about women's desire and ability to resist. Thus, Feroza's fear can be seen as an expression of resistance, not in that it includes action, but rather in that it constitutes a force which makes her notice that what may happen is something she doesn't want to see happen (Hydén, 2005). Thus, fear contains an unarticulated knowledge of what is desired and not desired. The fact that Feroza is frightened means that she was - and continues to be - opposed to her boyfriend's use of violence. This reading sees fear, helplessness and resistance as closely associated with each other, where fear is the resistance offered by those who are presumed to be powerless; and a

frightened abused woman in contact with her inner resistance is not so easy to dominate (Hydén, 1999).

The findings highlight that the process of ‘leaving’ does not end with a woman physically leaving her abusive relationship. For young women who have experienced and survived physical and/or sexual abuse, in addition to emotional abuse, fully disengaging from the relationship can feel particularly daunting. Importantly, the memories of their experiences can continue to instil fear, i.e. the power, control and influence of their dangerous boyfriends do not end with the ending of the relationship. These women might be faced with a more complicated process in their attempts to move their experience of abuse away from a position of primacy in their lives. It would be important to assist these women to recognise their past and present articulations and expressions of resistance; by continuing to fear their boyfriend after the ending of the relationship, these women are expressing their resistance to his ongoing influence in their lives.

#### **4.1.14. Intimate partner violence - “It really can happen to anyone”**

Extract 28: Sally

1     Sally   [...] She was so strong, and she’s so independent, and she’s so  
2           powerful, she’s incredible, she’s like one of those power women that  
3           I like – I absolutely love, I love power women - and she (.) and she (.)  
4           fell into this relationship that seemed to be great, and it can happen to  
5           anyone, like it really can happen to anyone – that’s another important  
6           line on all this stuff - because a lot of times it’s just an abusive man  
7           that’s out there waiting for another victim (.)

Importantly, women with first- and second-hand experience of IPV noted that any girl can ‘fall into’ - or ‘end up in’ - an abusive relationship – even women who are strong, independent, intelligent and empowered.

In Extract 28, Sally – a 19 year old White girl, tells of a good friend of hers who - despite being an empowered, self-reliant, competent and impressive woman - suddenly or unexpectedly stumbled into - or got caught in - an abusive relationship. Therefore, any woman – even tough, dynamic, confident and forcible women - can be deceived by an abusive man.

## Extract 29: Feroza

1 Feroza I believe I'm the average 'any girl', I come from a very nice home,  
 2 and everything is - I go to UCT - very, we're very well off,  
 3 everything is great, and I ended up in it, you know, you always think  
 4 it's people living in very bad areas that get (.) their boyfriends  
 5 are gangsters, but it's not, and he's from a very well off, you know,  
 6 everything's good, went to good schools, we've got everything, there  
 7 is nothing we don't have, and I went through it so I think that  
 8 anybody can go through that, I know that.

In Extract 29, Feroza – a 20 year old Coloured girl - speaks against the assumption that only people from impoverished and crime-ridden communities face the problem of IPV. She positions herself as a typical, common and ordinary girl who comes from a stable, well-educated and privileged middle-class background. Feroza makes the point that despite everything being “very nice” (line 1), “very well off” (lines 2,5), “great” (line 3) and “good” (line 6), she still resulted in being a girl who was badly abused (line 3). Hence, her advantages and privileges in life did not exempt her from experiencing something as ugly as partner violence. In her talk, Feroza makes the point that there is nothing particular about her that has made her vulnerable to experiencing IPV; in actual fact, everything about her would have indicated that she'd be insulated from such an experience.

It's important to think of the interactive context in which Feroza – and other young women – are saying that partner violence can happen to ‘any girl’; they are likely responding to what they think might be my – and the generalised audience's - assumptions and judgements of what kind of a girl ends up in an abusive relationship. In addition, the female participants in this study possibly assumed that I could identify with their middle-class background, hence, suggesting that even a woman like me could have “ended up in it” (Extract 29, line 3).

This theme contributes an important understanding - that young women need to feel able to underscore their power, intelligence, independence, confidence, education and/or family stability despite their experiences of intimate partner violence. Again, young women are concerned about how their story of partner violence can undermine how they prefer to present themselves to others, as well as how they prefer to be perceived and judged by others. It is therefore essential to attend to the self-presentation goals and concerns of young adults as they tell their stories of partner violence to others.

**4.1.15. “You realise how twisted love can get”: Impact of intimate partner violence on future relationships**

Female participants with personal experience of IPV were more mindful of issues of power and control in their current or future intimate relationships, and were cautious and fearful of losing their sense of self in these relationships. As described elsewhere in the literature (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001), all female participants with stories of partner violence found it important to give themselves time and to trust their intuitive feelings with regards the launching of new relationships. Many women spoke about their strong feelings of fear, ambivalence and vigilance in new relationships, and described a constant surveillance for warning signs of abuse. Warning signs included: excessive social control (including controlling how a girl dresses and behaves in public, and controlling contact with friends and family); manipulation; jealousy; possessiveness and physical aggression. Some women spoke about the deceptive nature of abusive men – these are men who are charming and popular and who “secretively turn out to be abusive”. Accordingly, several women commented that a person needs time and experience to recognise abuse in these intimate relationships.

Given that their boyfriends unexpectedly became abusive after a certain period of time in the relationship, several women felt unnerved by how difficult it could be to know and trust somebody, and felt overwhelmed at the prospect that it could happen again in the future. Two women suggested that they would possibly try to “provoke” a future partner to reveal what “type of person” he really was, or to expose his hidden violent “streaks” sooner rather than later.

After a recent break-up of their relationships, some women still felt very afraid and/or cautious to make superficial social contact with male friends, and had lost contact with all of their previous male and female friends. This alerts to the continued isolation women can experience long after their abusive relationships have ended, as well as the limited opportunities for interaction with - and feedback from - trusted male friends.

Extract 30: Sally

1 Sally [...] I feel like you can get temporarily lost in love, like you can just  
2 not know who you are, and lose a sense of the right way that you  
3 normally think. That’s why I’m like overly independent now. I’m so

4           sure about how I can think when I'm independent, that sometimes - in  
5           terms of losing myself in a relationship and losing myself in intimacy  
6           (.) - I'm nervous about it.

Sally (Extract 30) alerts to the dangers of an intimate love relationship: it can result in a person going astray, losing direction, losing a sense of self, and losing their mind and rationality. Sally uses the third-person “you” in lines 1-2 in order to generalise her statement and warning – again making the argument that it can happen to anyone. Opposed to the unease and apprehension she feels regarding an intimate relationship, Sally feels secure and certain in her ability to be sensible and sound when she is thinking and acting for herself.

#### Extract 31: Thandi

1     Thandi   You realise how twisted love can get. You can see that because  
2           you've been through it (.) you can (.) I don't know (.) identify things  
3           that could happen with love, whereas if you're to talk to someone  
4           who's never been in a relationship, for them love is that ideal  
5           situation, and then they can never understand how you say – you can  
6           love someone, but you can hurt them at the same time - and they're  
7           like, 'no, if you love each other you're not gonna hurt each other',  
8           but you've seen it happening, but then you don't want to see it  
9           yourself again (.) you'd rather not date than put yourself in that  
10          situation again. Yeah (.) that's my take on relationships, and shame,  
11          maybe with time I'll help my friends out a bit

Given her experience of emotional abuse, Thandi (Extract 31) has learned that love does not always conform to the fantasy or imagination of the ‘perfect’ love (lines 4-5, “that ideal situation”). In actual and real fact, love can get distorted and perverted (line 1, “twisted”) and result in harm and injury. Thus the paradox that a person can love and hurt a partner “at the same time” (line 6) – although inconceivable to some – is a familiar concept and experience for Thandi, and one that she wants to avoid in the future. Thandi feels pity and sympathy for her friends who unfortunately do not have this understanding of relationships, and comments that she will “with time” (line 11) assist her friends to know better.

Later in her interview, Thandi spoke of having “certain limits” and high standards for future relationships – she would not compromise her character and personality, or rush into a relationship; she wanted someone who was confident and secure and didn't mind her having her own friendships.

## Extract 32: Feroza

- 1 Adele What must happen for you to, one day, consider exploring the  
2 possibility of another intimate relationship?
- 3 Feroza Agh (sighs), actually, really, um, I don't know, sometimes you know  
4 you think about it, but just in a fantasy, but it's very unreal to me, I  
5 don't see myself being in a relationship with somebody else, at all, I  
6 can't see myself attaching myself to somebody, and us having a  
7 relationship and going to the movies, it's just, it doesn't feel, it feels  
8 likes it's just the end, I can't even explore somebody else as a person  
9 because I'm now, it's as if I'm him now, you know, I've just become  
10 him, and I've become this person in this relationship and I can't see  
11 somebody else in the picture, I can't even think about somebody else  
12 being in the picture, or, because I feel as if I don't have anything to  
13 give to that new person, you know, I don't know who I am anymore, I  
14 used to know, I used to know what I liked, and what I liked to dress  
15 and what I liked to - but now all those things are what he likes - so I  
16 don't even know, and I still don't know if I like those things, you  
17 know, if I like to dress that way, or not to speak to guys, I don't  
18 know, I'm unsure in myself (.) and even small things, tiny things,  
19 everything is just, I don't know, I can't start a new relationship now,  
20 because all the things that I would talk about is things that he had  
21 influence on. Suddenly, suddenly I look at other girls and I think,  
22 'how can you dress like that?', but I used to dress like that? I used to  
23 wear skirts, and it's just, I don't know if it's me, or if it's a new me,  
24 you know, or if it's just all of him that's now influenced by me, I  
25 can't separate it anymore, you know, it's so (.)
- 26 Adele Enmeshed and confusing..
- 27 Feroza Yes, I can't separate it anymore (.)
- 28 Adele So what about you now feels authentic and real to you, and how  
29 much is still caught up in his influence?
- 30 Feroza Yeah (.) I can't tell you, you ask me things, I just, I don't know,  
31 because I can't say if I'm telling you what I feel or what he's feeling,  
32 even if he's not even here, but I know everything that he's thinking or  
33 feeling, what he likes and, I don't know, I can't tell you the  
34 separateness of it, and there was, I know there was, I remember, you  
35 know, things, it's not that long ago, you know three and a half years  
36 is not that long ago, I remember being an individual person, just one  
37 person, but I can't feel like that anymore, it's not there.

The possibility of exploring future intimate relationships is a daunting and fearful prospect for Feroza (Extract 32). The fantasy of a new relationship, and “attaching” (line 6) herself to somebody else, feels surreal and illusory to her. Her repetition of the phrase “I can't” (lines 6,8,10,11,19,24-25,27,30,31,33,37), conveys how Feroza struggles to even imagine herself being in a relationship – she can't “see” (lines 5,6,10) or “think” (line 11) about it – mostly so because she struggles to distinguish her sense of self from the influence of her abusive ex-boyfriend; she can't “tell” (lines 30,33), “say”

(line 31), or “feel” (line 37) what about her is “separate” (lines 25,27,34) and individually unique anymore. Feroza’s repetitive use of the phrase ‘I don’t know’ (lines 3,13,16,17-18,19,23,30,33), communicates her uncertainty, doubt, confusion and hesitation; in lines 30-31 Feroza comments on her inability to answer my questions.

Even after the ending of their relationship, Feroza’s boyfriend’s presence and influence is all-pervasive – to the point that she believes that she personifies and embodies him (line 9, “it’s as if I’m him now”; lines 9-10, “I’ve just become him”); this allows no room for considering and exploring the possibility of “somebody else” (lines 5,8,11). Feroza questions how much of her basic likes and preferences are authentic and real (i.e. that it says something about her), and how much are the ongoing and remnant effects of her boyfriend’s influence (i.e. that it says something about him). Given her doubts about her identity, and her ability to choose what she favours for herself - as opposed to what she knows her boyfriend prefers - Feroza feels unsure about how she will be able to honestly represent, know and position herself in future relationships.

In having managed her boyfriend’s abuse for so long, Feroza has come to intimately know and anticipate all of his thoughts and feelings – to the extent that her opinions and feelings are no longer easily recognisable and visible to her. Although Feroza struggles to separate and tease out who she is/was away from her boyfriend’s abuse, she can remember being - and feeling like – a distinct and unique person in her own right at the start of their relationship.

Extract 33: Feroza

- |    |        |  |
|----|--------|--|
| 1  | Feroza | [...] It’s scary to think that I will be so cautious again, you know, I  |
| 2  |        | mean am I ever going to let that cautiousness go, I mean I want to get   |
| 3  |        | married and have children, everyone wants to, you know, most people      |
| 4  |        | do, and I don’t want it to happen when I’m forty, I want to enjoy, I     |
| 5  |        | used to want to enjoy young life, I used to think that I’d be married    |
| 6  |        | by 25, enjoying, you know, having a young life with your husband,        |
| 7  |        | but I don’t see that anymore, and it’s so, it’s upsetting to me, you see |
| 8  |        | I know I won’t be married by 25 because I don’t want to, because         |
| 9  |        | now I’ve put, instead of that, I’ve put other things there, I’ve put     |
| 10 |        | travelling and working in that place, which wasn’t there before, you     |
| 11 |        | know, goals have just now shifted because he has just ruined what I      |
| 12 |        | wanted.  |
| 13 | Adele  | So you feel you’ve had to give up a lot...                               |
| 14 | Feroza | I’ve lost a lot (.)  |
| 15 | Adele  | - dreams and hopes you had for your future...                            |



16 Feroza Yes, it's gone, you know, I, a big dream of mine is the children -  
 17 dream and I just, that's not gonna happen when I'm young- if it's  
 18 going to happen, it's not going to happen when I'm young - and that's  
 19 sad to me because I would have liked to be young when they are  
 20 around, and that's just gone, completely gone, because I can't go  
 21 have a relationship with somebody now, it's just, I have no tolerance  
 22 for it, no time and no tolerance just to go through this again in the  
 23 next few years, so already, obviously, the dream is gone and that's  
 24 very upsetting for me when I think about it.

Given her experience with IPV, Feroza (Extract 33) has learned to be circumspect, tentative and guarded in relationships, and to be watchful of potential danger. However, she is very mindful of how this “cautiousness” (line 2) can interfere with her future plans of wanting to get married and having children.

As also illustrated by Natasha (Appendix B), Feroza refers to the issues of time and timeline in talking about the implications of her experience with IPV for her life. As pointed out by Reynolds and Taylor (2004), ‘timing’ often has a “special resonance for women” (p.212), especially in relation to the biologically and socially limited time frame associated with the trajectory of marriage and childbearing. Feroza is negotiating her identity(ies) in a Western social and cultural context, where the sequence of love, courtship, marriage, parenthood and continuing coupledness persists as a dominant narrative of adult life (Reynolds et al., 2007). Feroza suggests that this developmental sequence of marriage and childbearing is normative – it is a familiar plan and desire that is shared by “everyone” and “most people” (line 3).

Prior to the abuse, Feroza had particular expectations and desires for her life trajectory – her dream was to marry young and enjoy an energetic and enthusiastic life as a youthful wife and mother (lines 5-6,19-20). Due to the abuse, Feroza’s boyfriend has destroyed (line 11, “ruined”) the structuring of her life story: she is now inserting new stages into her future plan (i.e. travelling and working, lines 9-11), thereby radically altering and shifting her time frame associated with her trajectory of marriage and children – she will not be a young wife and mother after all. Her experience with IPV has also taken away from the innocence of her earlier dreams.

Feroza’s talk here illustrates the subversive influence of IPV for a young adult’s life: as a young woman of 20 years old, Feroza no longer visualises - or aspires to - certain dreams and hopes which she used to have for her future (line 7, “I don’t see that anymore”), and this realisation is “sad” (line 19) and “upsetting” (lines 7,24). At this

young age, she has had to come to terms with certain losses and adjustments, and their implications for her identity-construction and life structuring.

In lines 21-23, Feroza speaks of having “no time and no tolerance” to go through a similar experience in the next few years. Here she seems to imply that she is running out of time and can’t afford to waste any more time with another abusive partner. She also conveys that she won’t be able to endure and resist another story of abuse – she won’t be able to allow - or suffer through - it again. Furthermore, given her adjusted life trajectory, Feroza’s time is committed to other “goals” (line 11) and pursuits, and there is currently no time, space or desire for exploring new relationships.

Later in her interview Feroza spoke of spending more time talking with her mother: out of curiosity to hear about her mother’s life when she was a young wife and mother, and in an attempt to “move away from being wrapped up in” her boyfriend. Here Feroza expressed a desire to no longer be so intensely absorbed - and bound up - with her boyfriend. She continued to talk about wanting to momentarily “sit in another world”, and to allow herself the imagination that life can be different. Feroza never told her mother about her experience of IPV; I wonder what stories Feroza’s mother would have decided to tell should she have known about the context of her daughter’s interest.

The findings here contribute to understandings of the post-separation phase – which has received less attention in the literature. This study illustrates how young people with past experiences of partner violence are consciously intent on negotiating equal power and control in their future intimate relationships. However - prior to embarking on another relationship – young women instinctively understand the importance of firmly re-establishing - and reconnecting with – their distinctly individual sense of self. After their retrospective assessments of past abusive relationships, young women can become fiercely protective of their self-interests and identity projects. Moreover, women have to come to full terms with the ramifications of these relationships, and adjust their identity-construction and life-structuring accordingly.

However, their knowledge of the dangers, distortions and perversions of abusive love relationships can result in women insulating themselves from the benefits of healthy peer relationships with other men and women. For some women in this study, the difficulty in being able to imagine good and successful intimate relationships,

contributed to their ongoing social isolation. It would therefore seem important to assist and encourage young adults to gradually explore and establish alternative relational connections. In return, young adults with personal experiences of partner violence have important knowledges and understandings that they can share with their peers.

#### ***4.1.16. Feedback to friends about intimate partner violence***

An important new finding – not previously identified in the literature – relates to how young men and women feel about giving their friends feedback about their potentially abusive intimate relationships. The overall majority of the women (and two of the five men) spoke about their caution in being direct and transparent with their friends whom they observed to be in potentially abusive relationships. Young women and men were very careful and tentative in explicitly naming these relationships as “abusive”, even though they felt able to recognise it as such. Participants spoke about being able to see and hear when a relationship was “bad” or “shaky”, but not wanting to alienate their friends with their interference. Women were concerned that their intentions and efforts to give their female friends honest feedback and to offer them help in identifying and leaving abusive relationships, would be judged as insincere, intrusive, meddlesome or even malicious. Women were fearful of any action that would threaten their friendships, and therefore chose to observe these relationships from the sidelines until their friends directly asked for help. Two of the men noted that their feedback to friends, women in particular, would most likely not be taken on board.

Extract 34: Sally

- |    |       |   |
|----|-------|---|
| 1  | Adele | How easy or hard was it to be honest and transparent with your            |
| 2  |       | friend about her relationship, and how you understood what you saw        |
| 3  |       | happening?  |
| 4  | Sally | I don't know (.) it was (.) it's a good question (.) I posed things very  |
| 5  |       | carefully – I let her figure them out by herself, like I'd go – I'd ask   |
| 6  |       | the questions, like when I finally used that word 'abusive' (.) she       |
| 7  |       | was dodging and I was dodging from putting that word directly on          |
| 8  |       | the table – I was like, do you think that you might want to look into     |
| 9  |       | research into finding out if this might be an abusive relationship,       |
| 10 |       | and she's just like, yeah - she'll look into that. I'm like – hello, this |
| 11 |       | is an abusive relationship – I'm sure, I'm positive, I know all the       |
| 12 |       | things. And (.) when we like sat on my bed with a friend, her and         |
| 13 |       | me, having this discussion, it was like, it was like, we have to be       |
| 14 |       | delicate – we're talking about her, we're not just talking about like     |
| 15 |       | what seems to be a bad relationship where she's strong and                |

16 independent and sure that she's gonna come out of it like a human  
 17 (.) like she's delicate and sensitive and scared and she's completely  
 18 brainwashed – she's a thousand times over brainwashed and (.) you  
 19 know, everything that you throw out at her could like break her, you  
 20 know, [. ] and that's just the sort of position he puts her in all the  
 21 time (.)

Despite her recognition and knowledge of IPV, Sally (Extract 34) is very tentative and hesitant in how she approaches the matter with her friend; both of them deliberately elude and evade speaking openly and explicitly about the friend's "abusive" (line 6) relationship. Sally also expresses a concern that her friend is fragile, frightened and easily traumatised as a result of her experience, and that she should be approached in a cautious, sensitive and timeous manner. Sally's use of the word "brainwashed" (line 18) conveys that her friend has been coercively and intensively persuaded and conditioned by her boyfriend, thus making it difficult for Sally to suggest an alternative way of making sense of the relationship.

Extract 35: Thandi

1 Thandi [...] You only have to reach your lowest low to be able to accept that  
 2 'this is not right for me', 'cause I've got a friend whose going  
 3 through more of an intense situation than I've been through, and I  
 4 can't tell her. I've decided that I can go and tell, and tell her like – 'I  
 5 can see the dynamics, things are not right in this relationship of  
 6 yours, either change it or leave the relationship', but I can see that  
 7 she'd probably think – 'no, it's because you're single, you don't  
 8 understand, you're trying to ruin our relationship', so I've decided to  
 9 let it be, when she sees it for what it is, then I can (.)  
 10 [...]  
 11 but then if I tell her - 'I know what you're going through and this and  
 12 this is happening', she would just think I'm being mean because  
 13 she's in love, why would I want to spoil that for her, is it because  
 14 I'm not dating what, why, it would be, I would actually become the  
 15 villain in the situation (.)

Given her personal experience of emotional abuse, Thandi (Extract 35) would be able to approach her friend and talk to her about her "intense situation" (line 3). However, she is concerned that her intentions will be misjudged by her friend as malicious, cruel and cunning – as though motivated out of jealousy and resentment. It's striking that Thandi anticipates that she will be the evil "villain" (line 15) in the story, as opposed to the good 'heroine' who alerts her friend to the harm, and who offers support and empathy. Hence, she will rather wait until her friend reaches her "lowest low" (line 1) and she

“sees it for what it is” (line 9) before she intervenes. Therefore, only when her friend is feeling weak, depressed and dejected, and able to recognise the abuse in her relationship, will Thandi feel it’s appropriate for her to offer her input and help.

Extract 36: Andre

- 1 Adele How closely would you look at someone’s relationship if you  
2 suspected that something wasn’t quite right?  
3 Andre Um, in my experience, like, you can try and look hard and stuff but  
4 people have become really stubborn, like if a guy is with a girl there’s  
5 nothing you can say that’s going to make him change his mind, and I  
6 also know girlfriends, friends who have told me that if a girl has  
7 made up her mind about a guy, there’s nothing you can say that’s  
8 going to change her mind about it, you know, so sometimes, I mean,  
9 you always look because you’re curious, but you know that there’s  
10 not much you can do about it (.) but it’s hard to judge what is an  
11 unhealthy relationship, um, you get some guys who, the other  
12 friend will say like - this girl is controlling him and stuff - but if he  
13 seems totally happy then, you know, maybe you have no place to  
14 say it, if he’s happy, whereas if he’s unhappy then maybe you  
15 should say something to him. I’ve got a few friends like that, where  
16 other friends accuse them of being, you know, wimps and stuff, but  
17 they seem happy, so what’s the problem.

Andre’s talk (Extract 36) suggests that young people can and do make an effort to closely examine and notice each other’s intimate relationships (line 3, “you can try and look hard”). His use of the word “curious” (line 9) implies that young people are interested, attentive and eager to know and learn about their friends’ relationships. However, Andre generalises that “people” (line 4) tend to be resolute and fixed in their opinions, i.e. they are resistant to advice or discouragement. He suggests that once a young man or woman has made a decision about a partner, they can’t be easily influenced by their peers (lines 9-10, “you know that there’s not much you can do about it”).

Andre makes the distinction between when friends should and should not take the liberty of explicitly judging - and commenting on - the relationships of their peers (lines 11-15); this is dependent on their ability to accurately evaluate whether a person “seems” (line 13) happy or unhappy. However this judgement of when a relationship is “unhealthy” (line 11) is not an easy and straightforward one; a relationship can be unsound, harmful or even dangerous and yet not be visible as such to peers.

Andre's talk again highlights the implications of partner violence or diminished personal power for a man's sense of masculinity (discussed earlier in this chapter). His comment about friends accusing friends of being controlled by their girlfriends – and therefore being “wimps” (line 16) - raises a problematic issue. It suggests that men can be harshly judged, blamed and ridiculed by other men (and perhaps also women) for not overtly displaying power and control in their intimate relationships. Therefore, men in both healthy and unhealthy relationships could feel uncomfortable and embarrassed to talk about their difficulties with personal power in their intimate relationships. Men who struggle with an imbalance or abuse of power in a relationship can be made to feel weak, timid, incompetent or cowardly by other men.

As discussed in the literature review, men ‘perform’ masculinity out of a need for acceptance and out of a fear of being feminised or emasculated (Kimmel, 1996, cited in Migliaccio, 2001). Men who fail to exhibit traditional masculine characteristics, such as independence, strength and control (Harris, 1995), are often scrutinised and marginalised by the dominant group, and designated a lower status in the social hierarchy (Migliaccio, 2001). Therefore, fearing emasculation, many young men possibly attempt to hide or deny those aspects of their identities or lives that result in this, such as being abused by their girlfriends or struggling to maintain a balance of personal power in intimate relationships.

In summary, despite their interests in – and efforts to – closely observe and attend to the intimate relationships of their peers, men and women are concerned that their intentions will be misjudged as inappropriate, misguided or selfish. Therefore, despite their keen observations and perceptions, young people are dissuaded from being transparent about their opinions, and/or honestly confronting and challenging each other about the nature of their intimate relationships. This possibly results in young adults minimising and undermining the impact and influence they can have in each other's lives.

#### ***4.1.17. Men as evaluators of “bad” men***

Extract 37: Andre

- 1 Andre [...] Often you'll hear a guy friend tell a girl 'this guy is bad news',  
 2 you hear it all the time when you're out at night at clubs, I think guys  
 3 definitely are a lot more aware of it than girls are.  
 4 Adele How so?  
 5 Andre Um, you've grown up with guys like that your whole life, through  
 6 junior school, high school, and I suppose there are some fundamental  
 7 things to being a guy that girls won't understand, and it's because we  
 8 share stuff about our girlfriends and you hear them talk about their  
 9 girlfriends in derogatory ways, and they will never show that part of  
 10 themselves to the girls because they know it won't enhance their  
 11 image.

Two male participants spoke about their ability to identify “tell tale signs” in men who were possibly abusive in nature: they described these men as being insecure and yet acting in a grandiose manner; these men often had arrogant, aggressive and “macho” demeanours – they were domineering and assertive with a self-conscious -, strong - or exaggerated - sense of power. Furthermore, these men often seemed to demand attention, authority and ownership in their public interactions with their peers and girlfriends.

Both these participants expressed their concern that women tended to be attracted to “mean men” who were arrogant and misleading with their charm, and who presented themselves as overly self-confident, impersonal and unobtainable. As commented by Andre (Extract 37), men are often aware of when another man was “bad news” - they warned their female friends about these men, however, girls did not always heed their advice and caution. Andre later explained that once a guy or girl had made up their minds about someone, it was difficult, if not impossible, to convince them otherwise.

As illustrated by Andre in Extract 37, men can and do scrutinise and evaluate other men, and have the capacity to recognise – and warn their female friends of – men who strike them as unpleasant, undesirable, dangerous or potential troublemakers.

Importantly, from a position of shared knowledge, shared experience and shared identity, young men have a special vantage point from which to observe each other in their relationships. Therefore, given their innate, underlying and essential knowledge of what it means “being a guy” (line 7), men can offer their female friends important insight and advice regarding potential intimate partners.

Furthermore, as Andre explains in lines 7-11, men have privileged access to observing how they each behave away from their respective girlfriends. Therefore, men can see

and hear things that girls can't, and can identify when a man is deceptive in how he presents himself to his partner.

Therefore, the talk of the male participants in this study highlight a new perspective – that young men engage in perceptive and ongoing evaluations of other men, and can identify men who are potentially “bad news” (line 1). Therefore, young men can play a vital role in offering their female peers insight, feedback and advice about their potential romantic interests.

#### ***4.1.18. Absence of help-seeking efforts***

The theme of help-seeking was identified in my literature review and attends to what women in violent relationships do when they reach out to others for assistance, and considers what kind of help is experienced as helpful to these women. Of the 11 women with first-hand experiences of partner violence, only one chose to fully disclose her victimisation to either informal or formal networks during the time she was still in her relationship. This stark absence of help-seeking efforts ties in directly with two previous findings discussed in this chapter, i.e. the re-evaluation of the relationship after leaving, and protecting reputations and identities. The finding that women whose relationships were characterised by emotional abuse only realised they were abused after having ended their relationships, partially explains why they did not seek help whilst in these relationships. Furthermore, women made a conscious decision not to reveal too much information about their troubled intimate relationships out of efforts to protect the reputations and identities of both their partners and themselves.

A few women who chose to talk to their friends about some troubling aspects of their intimate relationships became concerned that their friends were starting to feel burdened and irritated by their stories. Despite their good intentions, the responses from their friends possibly demonstrated frustration and/or lack of compassion, and after some time, friends also stopped trying to advise and persuade these women to leave their problematic relationships. These participants noted that not only did their talk of relationship problems seem potentially cumbersome to their friends, but their friends also were not always able to empathise with their experiences. One woman commented that her peers were young and busy people who had “a lot of things going on - you've got work, you've got studying, you've got boyfriends, everyone is wrapped up in their



own lives". Given their age, another female participant noted the expectation that time spent with friends should focus on fun, hopeful and positive matters.

Once their relationships had ended and they had redefined themselves as victims, women were more likely to disclose their experiences of intimate partner violence to a female friend as opposed to family. However, all of the female participants expressed concern that their friends would not know how to respond to their disclosure of abuse, and that their peers would not understand why they had 'stayed' in their abusive relationships. The women expected 'inappropriate' responses from friends that would imply a general unfamiliarity with the dynamics and consuming nature of violent relationships.

One female participant fully disclosed her experience of physical abuse to a good female friend, and sought out formal assistance whilst still in her violent relationship. Aside from experiencing physical violence, this woman was also physically violent towards her partner, and it was her own violence that originally motivated her to make contact with a psychologist. The one and only male participant who was experiencing abuse in his current intimate relationship did choose to disclose the abuse to both a male and female friend. Similar to the women in Lempert's study (1997b), this male participant made it clear that in telling his friends, and myself, he was not trying to leave his relationship. Rather, he sought assistance that would help him make sense of, justify and legitimate his continuing efforts in the relationship. Therefore, his disclosure was motivated by an attempt to control the violence and find new conceptual frames to explain it.

As stated earlier, the women who experienced either physical and/or sexual abuse in addition to the emotional abuse were aware of their victimisation, however, this awareness and understanding did not guarantee increased efforts at help-seeking. As described in the literature, feelings of embarrassment (Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993), and the stigma and anticipated judgemental response to being a victimised woman (Morrison et al., 2006), were hindrances to help-seeking amongst these participants. The fear of being labelled, belittled, criticised, blamed and/or pitied by family and friends made women hesitant to broach the topic with their informal networks. Similarly to the female college students in the study by Anderson and Danis (2007), these female

participants still associated stigma and embarrassment with the subject of IPV – despite acknowledging that partner violence may happen to any woman.

Female participants who had experienced physical and/or sexual abuse in particular, made a conscious decision not to tell their families about their experiences. Women remained silent out of fear of being judged or misunderstood, or out of a desire to protect their families from the shocking and devastating impact of such knowledge. Women from Muslim communities in particular did not expect that their families and communities would be supportive and non-judgemental, and believed their families would not welcome explicitly naming and acknowledging the abuse.

The three African female participants in this study did not trust the neighbours – in particular the women - in their community with information about their intimate relationships; their concern about “gossip”, “backstabbing” and ridicule prevented two of these women from disclosing their experiences of emotional abuse. The women noted their need and longing for a trusted female family member – such as an aunt or an older sister – in whom they could confide. In the absence of such a relationship, women were unlikely to consider disclosure of their experiences.

One African woman had recently found out that her mother was HIV-positive – after the mother’s boyfriend had died of AIDS; the boyfriend had never informed her mother of his health status. Aside from having to wonder about the nature of her mother’s own intimate relationship, this female participant did not want to burden her mother with her personal experience of partner violence; she felt a sense of responsibility and duty to be “strong” for her mother.

Importantly, aside from the one woman mentioned, none of the participants in this study had formally sought help or assistance with their experiences of intimate partner violence. Felicia - one of the participants who had experienced emotional and sexual abuse in her past relationship - explained why she didn’t seek out formal help at the time, i.e. she was afraid that she would have to involve her parents for financial support, and that they would demand to know her reasons for seeking help. Given her family’s conservative religious background, Felicia was afraid of being judged and blamed for having lost her “sense of morals”; she feared that her family would not understand that she was coerced into doing things she did not choose to do. Given that she had already

compromised so much - her studies, friendships and spirituality – she didn't want to risk feeling alienated from her family.

Another participant commented that the psychological services at the university were more directed to helping students with academic and adjustment problems. She did not feel that her problem of IPV was a familiar problem openly and frequently addressed by these services.

In contrast to existing literature that identifies the help-seeking efforts of abused women (Morrison et al., 2006; Davis, 2002b; Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Rose et al., 2000; Matar Curnow, 1997; Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993), the results of this study contribute a different and alarming perspective, i.e. that young adults currently in violent relationships do not anticipate that disclosure to informal and/or formal networks will be helpful, and are unlikely to use these networks in their efforts to understand and/or leave their abusive relationships.

Given the importance of protecting their reputations, identities and friendships – young adults are firmly invested in having the power to define themselves and their intimate relationships. The results from this study suggest that friends are not always successful in supporting the abused women's own interpretations of her experiences, thereby contributing to women choosing to remain silent about their experiences. By not disclosing their experiences to one another, young adults are not building knowledge, comfort, skill or experience in how to intervene in each other's lives regarding the issue of intimate partner violence.

In addition, the finding that young adults with personal experiences of intimate partner violence are unlikely to seek formal help is disconcerting, and raises some important questions: do young people in institutional settings have easy and affordable access to formal help-services?; do they feel comfortable and safe to approach these services independently of the involvement of family, peers, family doctors and/or lecturers?; are young people adequately ensured that issues of confidentiality and anonymity will be respected and maintained? Finally, it would seem important that formal help-services actively start encouraging young people to recognise and talk about intimate partner violence. Importantly, women and men should be invited to talk about a range of

relationship troubles whilst in their relationships – despite them not defining certain problems as partner violence.

#### ***4.1.19. Intimate relationships and culture***

##### **4.1.19.1. Dissuading young women from talking about IPV**

The three African female participants, all Xhosa-speaking, explained that in their culture women “do not flaunt” or conspicuously display their intimate relationships in front of their family or elders – this is considered inappropriate and disrespectful. Moreover, family members or elders in the community only acknowledge – and take interest in – the relationship that the woman ultimately commits to for future marriage.

Accordingly, these three women explained that young African women do not normally and comfortably talk to their parents or extended families about intimate relationships; conversations around topics such as sex are also considered culturally taboo. One woman commented on the specific attempts of recent media organisations –targeted at African communities - to explicitly encourage parents to speak to their children about intimate relationships and sex.

This thematic finding highlights the powerful role of culture in determining how young adults engage with - or disconnect from - their families and communities in the context of their intimate relationships. Although only limited to the talk of three African women, these interviews suggest that certain cultural communities are pertinently influential in dissuading, and even prohibiting, young adults from engaging in honest and open dialogue about their intimate partnerships. This results in young adults not having access to the knowledge, feedback and support of trusted elders in their community, and further strengthens the barrier of silence with regards to the disclosure of intimate partner violence.

##### **4.1.19.2. The “discomfort” of being a man in a patriarchal culture**

Two male participants spoke about their explicit awareness and concern relating to the expression of power in their intimate relationships, and related this specifically to the role and influence of cultural practices in South Africa.

To bring the discussion to his current intimate relationship, Thabo – a 24 year old African man - started his narrative by giving a temporal outline of his preceding relationships; he linked time and age with the concept of maturity and development. He highlighted the norm amongst his peers during his high school years – that it was a normal and expected part of the “routine” that a boy at the age of 16, 17 years “should have a girlfriend”; however, it was also assumed and expected that the depth and length of such a relationship, and at that stage of life, would be “shallow”, mostly superficial and short. Therefore, although his first relationship was “very good”, it lacked the depth, meaning and involvement that accompanied “serious” relationships. This first relationship ended “just as” Thabo was “growing up” – suggesting that it came to a natural ending as Thabo moved into the next stage of his development.

Thabo was quick to point out to me that his past relationships were not characterised by any “abusive behaviour”, and that he evaluated them as “appropriate”. Given the focus of this research study, it seemed important to Thabo that he presented these relationships as acceptable in nature and context.

Shortly after the above prelude, Thabo made clear what his concerns were, and what he had come to talk about – he felt very uncomfortable with his current girlfriend’s expectation the he should be the authoritative decision-maker in the relationship. He found it very disturbing that she didn’t engage in challenge, argument and negotiation, but that she preferred and encouraged him to have a stronger influence and authority in the relationship.

Extract 38: Thabo

1 Thabo I must say that our relationship hasn’t been also, in any way, abusive,  
 2 but I find that she expects more of me to be a decision-making person  
 3 and everything she would want to run by me and she doesn’t  
 4 challenge me in any way, uh, and I find that very disturbing for  
 5 myself, because I don’t like that, partly because of the history of our  
 6 culture and tradition - men being dominant and even if we are violent,  
 7 then the women kind of don’t have much say and I take that very  
 8 seriously, because at home where I come from, I’ve seen a lot of

9 relationships which are like that and (.) it's discomfort, ja, it's  
 10 discomfort and, ja, and similarly is that I've noticed that all the time  
 11 it's just me, it's like she has to meet my needs and she doesn't have  
 12 needs at all (.)

Thabo (Extract 38) presents himself as a young African man who is very mindful and aware of power relations in intimate relationships – he positions this concern within his cultural history of patriarchal traditions and male domination. By speaking of “our” culture (lines 5-6) and “we” being violent (line 6), Thabo explicitly includes himself as a man within this patriarchal context. Despite his relationship not being abusive (line 1), it is within this context of male authority and status that Thabo evaluates his current intimate relationship. He feels very concerned that his girlfriend's introverted, dependent and submissive nature could hold implications for future inequality and abuse in their relationship. Therefore, although he is not an abusive man, he understands how positions of inequality can disempower and compromise his girlfriend.

Thabo's use of words such as “disturbing” (line 4) and “discomfort” (lines 9, 10) underscore the unease and distress he feels in relation to - his girlfriend's lack of personal power in the relationship, and - the singular focus on his needs (lines 11-12). Given that intimate partner violence is a familiar concept to him (lines 8-9), Thabo is very earnest and sombre about how critical an issue it is (line 7-8, “I take that very seriously”).

Later in the interview, Thabo made the link between power and intimacy: in her attempts to be attuned to his needs, his girlfriend was not explicitly expressing her preferences, needs and desires; this resulted in Thabo struggling to feel a sense of intimacy and connectedness in their relationship. Thabo also raised his concerns about their sexual relationship - he couldn't be sure if his girlfriend's participation in sexual intimacy was an expression of her own needs, or a direct consequence of her efforts to meet his needs.

Thabo clearly felt a tension between the differing constructions he and his girlfriend had of masculinity. He positioned himself as a modern man who valued a relationship characterised by equality and mutual respect, and who was moving away from the traditional beliefs of men as entitled and domineering; he therefore did not sit comfortably with the power, authority and status his girlfriend expected him to have. Later in the interview, Thabo described his mother (who was a teacher) as a strong,

confident and empowered woman, whose power, self-sufficiency and self-efficacy was valued and respected by his father. This personal experience had informed what he expected and desired for his own intimate relationships. Similarly to Thabo, another male participant, Darren, spoke about wanting to be in a relationship with a girl who had “sustenance”, “character” and “her own fibre” – someone who had a strong sense of self. He felt that this was the kind of woman that he could trust in a relationship – someone who was mature, outspoken and independent.

Another male participant, Kobus - a 21-year-old White man - also demonstrated a consciousness of how race, gender and culture informed relationships. He expressed a cognisance of the inherent power imbalances between men and women, and the power that was often assumed and expected by White men in South Africa.

Similarly to Thabo, Kobus was very sensitive to the prevalence of patriarchal cultural practices in South Africa which entitled men to ownership and authority in relationships. Kobus spoke about having to “police” himself with regards his behaviour towards women – he was mindful of how certain innocent acts in a relationship (e.g. tapping his girlfriend on the bum) could be interpreted by others as condescending, demeaning and disrespectful towards women.

Extract 39: Kobus

1 Kobus We are a patriarchal society and so you can't just, it's exactly the same  
 2 as the race thing, you can't just come out of 10 years of democracy  
 3 and be OK with it, because it's not an identity, it's a, you know, we  
 4 need generations and generations of living with each other as people  
 5 as opposed to living with each other as a man or a woman, or  
 6 Coloured, Black, White you know, those are, all that stuff is part of  
 7 who I am, and it's ingrained, and like, I wouldn't consider myself to  
 8 be a racist, okay, but I do believe I am racist, because I have these  
 9 things, ja, because I have learnt them, they're still a part of my  
 10 identity and so difficult to, to get out, and if, if one has that, like if I  
 11 go into a relationship with that patriarchal attitude, I will pull power,  
 12 and if that person is willing to give it up then we've got a problem,  
 13 you know (.)

In his talk, Kobus (Extract 39) highlights the context of a patriarchal and racist society in which gender and race inequalities are inherent and implicit in everyday practices and identity (lines 6-7, “all that stuff is part of who I am”). He suggests that being a White man in a democratic South Africa – a man who is not racist, sexist or authoritarian - is

not an identity that can easily be adopted; rather, it is a process of becoming that requires time, practice and awareness. Kobus notes the danger of going into a relationship with “that patriarchal attitude” (line 11) and using force to “pull power” (line 11) – his use of the subjective “I” (lines 7-11) communicates his willingness to critically reflect on - and take ownership of - how he behaves in his relationships.

The illustrations from the interviews with Kobus and Thabo offer a new and important perspective, i.e. that – when thinking and talking about intimate partner violence - young men can and do take up positions in ongoing political and cultural debates of gender and power, and do plenty of “rhetorical” work (Billig, 1987) as they talk against the established ideas and practices of patriarchy and male domination. This finding highlights the many implicit and contextual challenges young men face in - striving to achieve personal integrity – and constructing their preferred masculine identities in their intimate relationships.

My interviews with Kobus and Thabo reminded me that stories are always partly personal and partly political - when you think you’re in the private, intimate and personal concerns, you are often in the centre of political and cultural discourse. By claiming narratives that opposed patriarchy and gender inequality, these men made a political choice that positioned both them as tellers, and me as (female) listener (Shuman, 2006). They made arguments for their interests (stories and meanings) that contest and challenge privileged and available narratives of dominant meaning systems in South Africa. Therefore, their narratives could be seen as having a political function, whether or not they contained explicit political content.

Certainly, a South African writer (Boonzaier, 2008), has recently argued that the transformation at the political, social and economic levels in South Africa have had – and will continue to have - implications for the ways in which men and women construct and narrate their interpersonal relationships and identities. Furthermore, by considering the performance and communication practices of the ordinary young men and women in this study, we - as listeners and readers - are invited “to listen on the margins of discourse and to give voice to muted groups in our society” (Langellier, 1989, p.243).

#### ***4.1.20. Women’s violence against male partners***



Only two female participants in this study spoke about their use of physical aggression and/or violence towards their male partner.

The following four extracts (Extracts 40 to 43) are taken from my interview with Sheetal - a 22 year old Indian woman. She impressed as an intelligent and reflective woman who was trying hard to make meaning of her intimate relationships. She spoke honestly and candidly about her own violent behaviour in past relationships.

At the time of the interview, Sheetal had multiple stories of intimate partner violence to tell: she had known of her father's severe physical abuse of her mother; her brother was emotionally and physically abusive towards his girlfriend; one of her previous boyfriends was very emotionally abusive towards her – and once threatened her with a gun; in her subsequent two relationships, she described herself as the violent partner; and finally, her last boyfriend became physically abusive and ultimately controlled the relationship.

Sheetal understood emotional abuse to involve attacking someone emotionally - to criticise, insult, degrade and publicly humiliate a partner. She did not think that she was emotionally abusive as such, but acknowledged that she was insecure, paranoid, anxious and jealous in her last two relationships, and that she expressed these emotions in a physically violent manner.

In the first relationship in which she became violent, her boyfriend restrained her when she became physically violent, and he eventually ended the relationship. Her recent boyfriend however “reacted in totally different ways”; after one incident of slapping him, he slapped her back, and consequently he has hit her several times without any physical violence from her side. Currently, her boyfriend is blaming her for his abuse, and arguing that she has directly provoked and caused his behaviour.

Extract 40: Sheetal

- |   |         |  |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | Adele   | What happened when you were feeling insecure – how did it lead to    |
| 2 |         | physical aggression?   |
| 3 | Sheetal | That's the thing, like like I would be insecure about something and  |
| 4 |         | then I'd accuse or like show them that I was insecure or like, um, I |
| 5 |         | would ask them questions and kind of interrogate them, that's the    |
| 6 |         | word they used, interrogate, and, um, if they didn't answer quick    |

7 enough, or like if I thought this answer was too, was like  
 8 unsatisfactory, or you know, it aroused more suspicion, then I'd get  
 9 angrier and then I'd like hone in on something and I'd like pick on  
 10 their words and, um, I'll just get upset with this idea so I would get  
 11 angrier and angrier and then they would get more scared and, um,  
 12 they would withdraw and then I would like, you know, I would still  
 13 be like, um, I don't know, like getting angrier, um, so they'd  
 14 withdraw, and um, I don't know, I can't really tell you when I would  
 15 get physical but I get physical in that I'd slap them, or like scratch, or,  
 16 um (.) like they'd hold my hands, obviously, like that's what the guy  
 17 would do if a girl came at him, so they tried to restrain me by  
 18 restraining my hands and then I tried to bite, or, you know, I'd still try  
 19 to get at them, so my anger was at a point where like I couldn't  
 20 control it, I wouldn't like just stop, I would try and try more, so I  
 21 think it was abuse because, I think I hurt them quite badly, like the  
 22 last one - I did, I hurt him quite badly, I mean he'd have scars, like  
 23 some like scratches or like if I hit him maybe he got bruised or like  
 24 something like that, and, um, ja, I would say it was abuse because,  
 25 um, (sighs) I don't know, because (.) I'd keep at it and I'd want to  
 26 hurt them, like (.) I think that's the reason. If you're just aggressive  
 27 then you wouldn't really try to hurt the person, but I was trying to  
 28 hurt them, 'cause I wasn't getting what I wanted, emotionally maybe,  
 29 I wasn't getting that reassurance from them, so I wanted to hurt him,  
 30 them like, I don't know how it works, but but that's what I wanted to  
 31 do

Previous research has shown how violent men often deny and minimise their responsibility, thereby reconstructing their self-representation and redefining their identity (Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993). Importantly, Sheetal (Extract 40) represents herself as accountable and responsible for her violence, and describes how her violence was the result of a systematic build up and release of her anger. As discussed in the literature review, both men and women use attributions and accounts as a means to deflect blame from self and partner (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a). Aside from mentioning once that she “couldn't control” her anger (lines 19-20) - Sheetal does not offer any justifications, apologies or excuses for her violence, and directly considers issues of intent, blame and causality (Eisikovits & Winstok, 2002). However, by doing so she constructs an account that exculpates her boyfriend.

Sheetal qualifies her behaviour as “abuse” (lines 21,24) by noting the impact of – and intention behind - her behaviour. In terms of the impact – Sheetal “hurt” (lines 21,22,26,27,28,29) her boyfriends badly; her boyfriends were left with “scars” (line 22), “scratches” (line 23) and bruises (line 23). With regards her intentions – Sheetal notes that she “wanted” (lines 25-26,29,30-31) and was “trying” (lines 27-28) to hurt them. As I discussed earlier in this results chapter, women with first-hand experiences of IPV

carefully considered the issue of intent, and violent behaviours that were deemed to be intentional were considered to be abusive - despite its impact. Here Sheetal notes that both the intent behind – and the impact of – her violent behaviour was negative.

In the next extract, Sheetal tells of her most recent relationship in which her boyfriend also became physically violent.

Extract 41: Sheetal

1 Sheetal He's the type of person who wouldn't take that kind of thing from  
 2 anyone, so by like the second time I did it, he was quite angry and he  
 3 didn't, um, he reacted in totally different ways than the other guy and,  
 4 um, and then I slapped him once and he slapped me back and then,  
 5 so, obviously (laughs) his slap was much more intense (laughs) and  
 6 then, um, so I stopped, and like obviously I was upset, I was crying  
 7 and things, and then he was sorry about it afterwards but, um (.) I  
 8 mean we were both sorry about it afterwards, like we didn't really  
 9 know whose fault it was, or you know where it started and what he  
 10 should have done in that situation and, um, so the next time, I  
 11 actually, that's when I stopped, and that's when I said like 'I actually  
 12 can't do this' and maybe it was because he hit me back, you know, so  
 13 the next time we were like in a very passionate fight and I was really  
 14 angry, um, then we'd shout and like scream and he hit me without me  
 15 doing anything, so it had like now crossed over, and, um, and then the  
 16 third time he hit me again without me, um, but but like, um [...] he  
 17 said that he had never done anything like that before in his life, and I  
 18 obviously triggered something in him, so, from then on we've been  
 19 having a lot of problems [...] he felt like I was the one in the wrong  
 20 and, um, I have to sort my problem out for us to work, and then he  
 21 became, I mean I don't say it wasn't my fault, it was like I started the  
 22 whole (.) um (.) you know like (laughs), I started everything going  
 23 wrong but he, um, he doesn't even talk about what he did wrong  
 24 anymore because he feels like I was the one who made him do that,  
 25 nobody else in his life has made him do such a thing, so I'm like the  
 26 problem [...] and so our relationship deteriorated from there, and  
 27 that's why we broke up now because we can't handle our fights  
 28 because he keeps getting back to that and blaming me for everything

Sheetal (Extract 41) comments on the context, intensity and impact of her boyfriend's abuse – him hitting her subsequently occurred in the absence of her violence; it felt stronger and more “intense” (line 5) than her own violence; and it managed to scare and “upset” her (line 6). In other cases where women had used violence against their male partner, it was found that women's violence differed from that perpetrated by men in terms of nature, frequency, intention, intensity, physical injury and emotional impact (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). It seems that Sheetal was frightened and bewildered by the

intensity and impact of her boyfriend's initial violent response, which resulted in her deciding to stop her own violent behaviour (lines 11-12). Her laughter in line 5 possibly conveys her shock and nervousness, and her realisation that her boyfriend's violence was no laughing-matter.

However, given that she was initially violent - seemingly in absence of physical violence from his side - Sheetal at first struggles to assign blame; she questions whose "fault" (line 9) it was that "it started" (line 9), and cannot determine what kind of response from her boyfriend would have been appropriate, legitimate or acceptable given the circumstances (lines 9-10). As discussed earlier, by questioning the intent behind her boyfriend's actions, Sheetal struggles to name his behaviour as abusive - despite its negative impact.

Later in the interview Sheetal acknowledged that subsequent to his use of violence, her boyfriend wielded the most power in the relationship; he was "cold", didn't make her feel good about herself, and liked to be dominant and in control. She described herself as constantly trying to please him by acting in ways that were deemed "acceptable" for their relationship. Therefore, in the context of this particular relationship, her boyfriend's violence, as opposed to her initial violence, seemed to be associated with a 'constellation of abuse' that included a variety of additional intimidating and controlling acts (Dobash et al., 2000).

I felt it would be important for Sheetal that she not merely conceptualise and measure her violence as discrete 'acts' that occurred (i.e. she slapped her boyfriend), but that she rather take into consideration the nature, sequence, consequence, motivations and intentions of both her and her boyfriend's violence in their relationship. Certainly, the 'Violence Against Women' literature stresses that in order to understand this violence, violent events should be studied within the context of actions and intentions associated with the event and its aftermath (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Furthermore, in terms of consequences of violence, it has been shown that women experience significantly more negative effects from partner violence than men – including physical injuries and emotional side-effects, such as fear, depression and anxiety (Dobash & Dobash, 2001; Jackson et al., 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Molidor & Tolman, 1998; Vivan & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994).

In lines 16-28 Sheetal's boyfriend directly blames her for his violence; the violence is defined by her boyfriend as her particular deviance and problem – which in turn has provoked and incited his violence (line 18, “triggered”). Sheetal's use of the phrase “crossed over” (line 15) also implies that her violence had now been transformed into - and become interchanged with – his violence. However, despite acknowledging some blame and responsibility for initiating a violent interaction in the relationship, Sheetal does not sit comfortably with her boyfriend's unambiguous accusation of blame. Her choice of emphasis on certain words in lines 24-26 (“I”, “I'm”, “made”, “nobody else”) communicates anger, indignation and resistance in response to his claims.

Extract 42: Sheetal

- 1 Adele And what feedback have you been getting from friends?  
 2 Sheetal [...]I think my best friend is the one I feel the most comfortable with  
 3 about talking about the abuse and, um, well she was the one who told  
 4 me to think about it, think about getting out when she heard that he  
 5 had abused me, and, um, she didn't really, like about the abuse that I  
 6 was giving, she didn't really regard it like when a man abuses a  
 7 woman, it's like, um, you know, she didn't attach so much, um,  
 8 importance to it, but when she heard that he did something to me,  
 9 then, you know, she advised me to think about it, or like think about  
 10 where it's going from here (.)

Extract 43: Sheetal

- 1 Sheetal I know of a few people as well and two girls who are abusive and, I  
 2 don't know, I think it's something that is ignored a lot and we don't  
 3 know where we're supposed to be, and in my situation where my  
 4 boyfriend hit me back, I don't like, um, I've been hearing my whole  
 5 life how 'domestic violence - the man hits the woman - and it's  
 6 wrong - and even if he does it once, it's wrong and - you should  
 7 leave, and things like that, but I felt blamed for it because, not  
 8 because he made me feel blame for it or (.)  
 9 Adele You felt you provoked it?  
 10 Sheetal Yes, I did feel like I provoked it, I did trigger it in him (.)  
 11 Adele So, you're not holding him fully accountable for it?  
 12 Sheetal I'm not ja, I am assigning myself some blame and I don't know  
 13 whether, you know, that was the same as whether I'm supposed to  
 14 run now or maybe he should have run the first time I slapped him (.)  
 15 Adele Are you alarmed by the fact the he has hit you several times now?  
 16 Sheetal But like the thing is I've hit him and even if I'm not stronger I I hurt  
 17 him (.)  
 18 Adele But do you question his nature given that he felt justified to respond  
 19 in that way, and that he has hit you subsequently?  
 20 Sheetal (.) It wasn't self-defence (.) but, it's difficult because I feel like I

- 21 I started it and I feel like if I hadn't started it, um that side of him  
 22 wouldn't even have come out, you know, so I feel like, um (.) I feel  
 23 guilt in that way – that I made something in him come out that didn't  
 24 really um surface before - like that I'm bad for him in some kind of  
 25 way because I did that. And he believes that too, that I did this to him  
 26 Adele So, should the two of you continue a relationship in the future - that's  
 27 a lot of power that he now has...  
 28 Sheetal Exactly (.) there's definitely this higher ground that he has and that he  
 29 rubs in, you know, so that I couldn't handle that now, and that's why I  
 30 think the break up is best (.)

In Extracts 42 and 43 Sheetal highlights her struggle in making sense of IPV outside of a gender framework. She notes how the issue of women who are abusive is avoided and bypassed by others (Extract 43, line 2), making it difficult for abusive women to know how to place or position themselves in relation to understandings of IPV. Sheetal's use of the plural pronoun "we" (Extract 43, lines 2-3) indicates that she includes and identifies herself as a girl who is "abusive" (line 1). In Extract 42, Sheetal tells of her best friend who disregarded and discounted Sheetal's abuse towards her boyfriend as unimportant, and not comparable to "when a man abuses a woman" (lines 6-7).

As a young woman I think it was very brave of Sheetal to speak openly and candidly with me about her violence. Her talk underlines how gender-specific constructions of "domestic violence – the man hits the woman" (Extract 43, line 5) do not account or allow for a more complex and ambiguous experience that includes abusive women or abused men. The dilemma illustrated by Sheetal's talk has been debated in existing literature. Certainly, for the most part, legislators, policy makers, legal and social service professionals and community advocates have dealt with the issue of IPV as primarily a problem of men's violence against a female partner. Accordingly, almost all services and programmes are designed to deal with the serious problem of male violence against an intimate female partner, and not the obverse (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). However, debate continues concerning whether and how gender shapes partner violence. Some researchers suggest a gender neutral approach is warranted (Straus, 2008), whereas feminist scholars insist that gender - and male dominance specifically - must be at the foreground for a meaningful understanding of relationship violence to emerge (Dobash et al., 1998; Dobash et al., 1992).

Within the context of the above argument, it's important to attend to the interaction between Sheetal and myself in Extract 43, and to consider what my questions communicated to her about my evaluation and meaning-making of her particular

situation. Sheetal was a woman who had had significant first- and second-hand experience with IPV; her father, brother and first boyfriend were all emotionally and physically abusive men. Furthermore, her recent boyfriend also seemed to be very dominant and controlling in the relationship. This context certainly influenced how I understood and judged Sheetal's own violent behaviour.

It would seem that Sheetal's violence emerged in the context of her jealousy, distrust, and insecurity over potential betrayals, and in her efforts to gain a sense of control and efficacy in her relationships. Importantly, the meanings and consequences of her violence became significantly different from those of her boyfriend. Her boyfriend maintained greater situational control over the violence itself - including whether Sheetal's violence was permitted to occur or was met with violent sanction.

During our interview, I was aware of my understanding and meaning-making of Sheetal's boyfriend as abusive – irrespective of her initial violence towards him. Given my position of power as interviewer, I was aware of how my alternative interpretations of her situation could possibly have resulted in us struggling for control over the definitions of her experiences (Lempert, 1997b). In lines 16 and 18 (Extract 43), Sheetal and I start our response and question – respectively – with the word “but” – thus conveying some reservation, counter-argument or objection to what the other has said. However, whilst maintaining this positional reflexivity, I remained mindful that the research encounter would not have been helpful or successful if I didn't hear and support Sheetal's particular ascriptions of meaning (Lempert, 1997b). I was therefore very aware of the importance of underscoring Sheetal's own interpretations of her experiences into the meanings we negotiated during our interaction.

The following extract (Extract 44) is from an interview with Feroza – a 20 year-old Coloured woman who had experienced severe physical abuse in her relationship with her ex-boyfriend, ranging from hand twisting, to neck choking and head banging.

Extract 44: Feroza

1 Adele How does that make you feel when people cannot see what your  
2 boyfriend is really like, and when he also pretends to others?

- 3 Feroza Agh (sighs), it's not a good feeling, it makes me feel, agh (sighs), you  
 4 know, I wanna strangle someone - oh, there's another thing we  
 5 haven't talked about – that he has made me, um, also have this  
 6 hysteria or violent streak – I never had, I don't have it, and I didn't  
 7 have it - but I, I would start, you know, after a long long while of him  
 8 pushing me, I'd just push him, and I just, and I'd go home and think,  
 9 'I am not that type of person - why did I do that?', and then I just  
 10 think, 'how did that happen, I don't do that, I'm not violent - ever, and  
 11 suddenly I'm hysterical', and I was never hysterical before, and now  
 12 I'm hysterical, and now I'm shouting and I spend all my time  
 13 shouting, crying and sometimes shoving you as well.
- 14 Adele How do you make sense of that?
- 15 Feroza I don't know, it doesn't make sense to me, it just makes me think that  
 16 he has done this, it's got to be, I didn't do it before, I didn't start this  
 17 outburst, I was never this way, you know, never, and angry (.) but it's  
 18 just, it's not a natural thing to be this way, for me, I can feel it's  
 19 unnatural, but he sort of, I don't know if it's 'I want to get back at  
 20 him', or if I suddenly started doing things that he does, you know,  
 21 being abusive because he's abusive, I don't know (.) I don't want to  
 22 be a part of that - abuse- it's not nice (.) you feel as if you are  
 23 somebody else.

With her phrase, “I wanna strangle someone”, (Extract 44, line 4) Feroza connects with her anger and aggression regarding the deceptive nature of her boyfriend's abuse; she chooses to direct this fury at a general “someone” (line 4) instead of aiming it at her boyfriend. It's interesting that Feroza uses this particular phrase to express her emotion; in many ways she has been figuratively stifled and suffocated in her relationship by her boyfriend's excessive controlling behaviour; she has also on numerous occasions literally been strangled and choked. By voicing this statement (“I wanna strangle someone”), Feroza immediately makes the link to something which has concerned her, i.e. her own violence within the relationship; she alerts me that this is something we should talk about, given the context of our conversation (lines 4-5).

Feroza then goes on to explain that her boyfriend has made her also have this “hysteria or violent streak” (line 6), and she repeats the word “hysterical” (lines 11,12) several times for emphasis; these choice of words convey that Feroza believes she had sudden and neurotic outbursts of violence and exaggerated emotion, characterised by a loss of control and irrationality. However, Feroza qualifies that this particular response from her only started after “a long long while” (line 7) of facing her boyfriend's physical abuse.



Feroza describes incidents of shouting, crying, shoving and pushing her boyfriend. It seems clear that these emotions and behaviour were in direct response to her boyfriend's abuse; therefore, given the context of her violence, Feroza's behaviour seems far more appropriate and understandable as opposed to irrational and exaggerated. It is very likely that Feroza's meaning-making of her behaviour in these instances was strongly influenced by definitional dialogues with her boyfriend; given his power and control, her boyfriend likely imposed his understanding of what was happening in the relationship (Cavanagh, 2003; Lempert, 1997a) – thereby making Feroza believe that she was “also” (line 5) as violent as he was.

However, this belief that she is a violent and “hysterical” person does not sit comfortably with Feroza. She moves between past and present tense in her efforts to persuade me, and herself, that she is “not that type of person” (line 9): “I never had, I don't have it, and I didn't have it” (lines 6-7); “I don't do that, I'm not violent - ever” (line 10) and “I was never this way” (line 17). Therefore, Feroza cannot integrate a violent and “abusive” nature (line 21) into her sense of self – either prior to - or presently in - the relationship. It is something that feels “unnatural” (lines 18-19) and alien to her – as though she were “somebody else” (lines 23). This conveys that the violence feels contrary to her character and nature, and obviously deviates from what she expects from - and knows of - herself. Furthermore, the notion of “being abusive” (line 21) is not something that Feroza chooses to be a part of.

It's important to note the implication of the word “hysterical” (lines 11,12) – it implies that violence is associated with a loss of control. In Feroza's case, she feels that she was driven to violence by her boyfriend's behaviour; however, with regards her boyfriend's violence towards her - to understand it as a loss of control would mean losing sight of his ongoing and purposeful dynamic of control and intimidation.

The work of Eisikovits and Buchbinder (1999) – described in my literature review – is helpful in thinking about Feroza's use of language here. Her perceptions of herself and of the violence as ‘hysteria’ and “outburst” can be understood as a linguistic expression of control in her attempts to cope with her experience of IPV. Perceiving violence as an “outburst” (line 17) suggests that violence is a result of uncontained anger and failure of self-control; in her talk, Feroza implies that her violent behaviour was a result of her failure to regulate and contain herself – thereby failing to control and manage the

violent situation. Previously, Feroza has alluded to the energy she directed towards avoiding escalation, and balancing and controlling her boyfriend's tension. These efforts to balance the pressure made the theme of self-control central in her everyday life and the joint reality of her and her boyfriend as a couple (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

Feroza's talk highlights an important aspect of the struggle for control which is related to her perception of her boyfriend as provoking her loss of control. Given that her boyfriend has succeeded in 'making' her become "hysterical" (lines 5-6), and getting so "angry" (line 17), Feroza now experiences guilt for her 'inappropriate' behaviour. She possibly also feels a sense of helplessness as he now controls her lack of control - resulting in them now sharing similar positions of lack of control. Since her sense of coping and survival are strongly linked to her ability to control her boyfriend and his violence, this loss can be detrimental to Feroza's view of herself (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

In Feroza's relationship her boyfriend's physical violence was associated with a 'constellation of abuse' that included a variety of additional intimidating, aggressive and controlling acts (Dobash et al., 2000). The full spectrum and dynamic of his abuse, not only resulted in physical injuries, but also had emotional consequences for Feroza as her boyfriend sought to control and regulate her life. As found elsewhere, Feroza's violence here clearly seems to be associated with self-defence, self-protection and/or retaliation, and occurred in a context of ongoing violence and aggression from her boyfriend (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Miller, 2001), and in the absence of other intimidating or coercive forms of controlling behaviour on her side. Furthermore, Feroza's violence differed from that perpetrated by her boyfriend in terms of nature, frequency, intention, intensity, physical injury and emotional impact.

The interviews with the two women in this study who had used physical aggression in their relationships illustrate the importance of examining the interactive context in which a woman's violence occurs. The findings furthermore highlight three important issues that were not explicitly identified in my literature review: firstly, women in abusive relationships are likely to struggle to separate their use of violence from their boyfriend's violence, and this blurring of boundaries will complicate women's attempts at making sense of their behaviour. Secondly, by holding themselves accountable for

their physical aggression - despite its legitimate context – women in abusive relationships are likely to continuously grapple with the ambiguous task of determining blame, intent and causality. Lastly, the results underscore the definitional power of simplistic gender-specific constructions of intimate partner violence, thereby making it difficult for violent women to know how to position themselves in relation to popular narratives of IPV.

#### ***4.1.21. Keeping the family “secret” of intimate partner violence***

Interviews with female participants in this study revealed an important theme not identified in my literature review – relating to how young women speak about their experience of having had a father who was abusive towards their mother. Five female participants in this study came to tell such a story, and all of them made reference to the ‘silence’ and ‘secrecy’ surrounding the family story of intimate partner violence. The use of the word “secret” points to the fact that this abuse often took place in private and covert spaces and interactions, and was easily and deceptively kept hidden and concealed from others. Importantly, the young women were burdened with this knowledge of partner violence in the home; they felt pressured to collude and conspire with the family’s silence and avoidance, and to not reveal their experience to others. One participant spoke about her father’s abuse of her mother as “a dirty secret” – this woman described feeling ashamed and resentful of this knowledge - conveying a sense of being contaminated by the contemptible, unpleasant and sordid nature of it.

Another new finding was that maintaining the silence regarding the family’s ‘secret’ of IPV held negative implications for these young women’s relationships with their siblings. Three of the five women felt emotionally disconnected from their siblings, and did not know how their brothers and/or sisters were making meaning of their shared experience. By sharing the pain and secrecy of their father’s abuse of their mother, these siblings had become silent in relation to each other. Perhaps it was too difficult and painful for these young women and their siblings - to name their experiences, and - to openly tell and listen to each other’s stories; this in turn resulted in them struggling to develop a sense of intimacy and trust. Therefore, despite them sharing a personal and traumatic history, they did not know how to support and validate each other’s experience without talking about it. Therefore, intimate partner violence had the power to significantly hurt and rupture family bonds.

Three of the five women spoke about how, over time, they moved from silence about their father's abuse to a vociferous outspokenness about it. These women started expressing their distress and anger at their father's behaviour within the private context of their home environment, and also challenged and confronted their mothers about why they seemingly accepted the abuse. These participants continuously shifted their evaluative positions in relation to their mothers – they communicated anger and disappointment at their mothers for staying, but also expressed their gradual understandings of why their mothers found it difficult to leave – reasons included: fear of losing their children; fear of gossip and reprisal from the community; lack of self-esteem and confidence; and the desire to not break up the children's parental home.

Importantly, the mothers of four of the five women were no longer in their violent marriages at the time of their daughter's interview; these four mothers had all left their abusive husbands after many years of marriage. Similarly to the finding that young women in this study only came to tell about their experiences of partner violence after their relationships had ended, it seems likely that the divorce of their parents had contributed to these four women's willingness to tell the story of their father's violence. One of the five women was engaged in a process of group therapy at the time of the interview – and acknowledged the discursive and therapeutic space offered by the group as central in her ability to talk about her father's longstanding abuse of her mother.

Existing literature on the methodological meaningfulness of reading for conflict and voice in the narratives of young women who have experienced abuse (Belknap, 2000; Gilligan, 1990) is helpful in thinking about the implications of the young women's silence in this study. By having felt pressurised to conspire with their family's silence regarding the secret of intimate partner violence, the voices of the young women were silenced, and their knowledges and experiences were dismissed. From when they were young girls, these women had to bring their self into agreement with others, and consequently learn not to speak about what they know. By not being able to speak honestly, these women struggled to stay in connection with others – their mothers, siblings, peers and intimate partners. Certainly, four of the five women spoke about their difficulties in feeling contained, connected and confident in their current intimate relationships, and their struggles in expressing and negotiating love, trust, conflict and power in healthy ways.

Although the women had briefly mentioned their father's abuse of their mothers to one or two good friends along the way, three of them mentioned that they had never chosen to tell their stories in 'this' way. Therefore, the relational and discursive space of the research interview offered women the opportunity to voice the unspoken, and to fully tell their stories in descriptive, detailed, intimate and meaningful ways. By speaking out against self-silencing, self-sacrifice, and self-negation, these women reclaimed their voice of 'psychological resilience' (Gilligan, 1990).

As pointed out by Belknap (2000), it is important to think about the profound effect this silencing of young girls and women has on maintaining a society's tolerance of violence against women. The silence around their personal experiences of partner violence immobilises young women and keeps the abuse out of the public eye; in contrast, using their voice of resilience brings attention to the problem, moves it into the public sphere, and supports the women in their efforts to make sense of their experiences.

#### ***4.1.22. The impact of relational vulnerabilities on men's intimate relationships***

Tying in with the above discussion, two of the five male participants reflected on their difficulties in managing and sustaining healthy intimate relationships – and linked these struggles to their experiences of - and relationships with – their parents.

Darren, a 21 year old white man, described himself as a very private person who struggled to maintain intimate and serious commitments. He described a tendency to be very defended in relation to others and to only engage in "casual" and superficial relationships. Darren immediately contextualised this by explaining that he was cautious and fearful of getting hurt and rejected in relationships, and linked this to how he grew up – he came from "a broken home", and moved between living with his mother, his father and stepmother, and boarding school. These relationships were therefore characterised by discontinuity and disconnection. Given his caution, Darren did not easily trust the perspective and influence of others; he felt more in control when relying on his own private judgement, and therefore was not likely to seek out advice and feedback from friends or family about his relationships.

Similarly, Kobus, another 21 year old White man, also explained why it was difficult for him to negotiate and sustain healthy intimate relationships. Kobus spoke about being very conscious of how he positioned himself within relationships – he was aware of his tendency to fear and expect disappointment, failure and rejection. Kobus linked this to his experience of emotional abuse from his parents – he described both his mother and father as emotionally unavailable and troubled. Kobus made the link between the failure of his primary relationships with both his parents, whose own marriage also ended up in divorce, and how it had impacted on - and informed - his current struggle with establishing his own intimate relationships.

Extract 45: Kobus

1 Kobus I just don't, I do not have the knowledge to get into a relationship by  
 2 myself. I don't have that knowledge. It's not, it was taken away from  
 3 me, or it wasn't given to me, I don't know, it's just, I don't have that,  
 4 and I think one probably learns those things from, one learns those  
 5 things from people in your environment, and from society at large. I  
 6 mean, if you watch TV, if you watch soapies and stuff, that's where  
 7 you see how people relate to each other and I think it's quite sad that I  
 8 and other people also get their ideas of relationships from TV, I  
 9 mean, it's just a, it's often not real and it's often exaggerated in some  
 10 way that it's just, it doesn't happen that way

Kobus's talk (Extract 45) highlights an important issue: given his lack of positive role-modelling in his relationships with his mother and father, he has been struggling to conceptualise and trust his own ideas and understandings of what an intimate relationship should look like, and how he must initiate - and behave in - one. Kobus talks of having been denied the prior knowledge about what to enact, or strive for in a relationship (lines 2-3, "it was taken away from me, or it wasn't given to me"). Instead, he's had to look towards the media – such as soap opera shows – for instruction; however, he points out that these popular romanticised stories often embellish, misrepresent and overstate reality.

Kobus underscores the need for positive, accessible and "real" (line 9) role models for men who want to initiate and think about healthy intimate relationships. Later in his interview, Kobus pointed out the impact of an absent father on his masculinity formation. Given that he didn't know how to relate to men, and how to be "typically male", most of his friends at university were initially female. As a result, Kobus engaged with women's knowledges of how to be a 'good' man in a relationship. He told

of having learned the importance of being sensitive, loving, and emotionally honest and expressive in relationships. Given his experience with his parents, Kobus was actively trying to engage with alternative possibilities – that intimate relationships could be necessary, safe, rewarding and empowering. Given his concerns and thoughtfulness about relationships, Kobus actively sought and valued dialogue with - and feedback and guidance from - his friends.

In his interview, Kobus referred to himself as a “metrosexual man” – “a man who is a man, but who can also be emotionally involved and available”. Darren also described himself and his friends as “metrosexual” – these were men with a different sense of masculinity: they were “easy-going”, “accepting”, and sensitive to cultural, racial and sexual diversity. Tying in with the earlier discussion of young men in patriarchal cultures, the interviews with the young men in this study suggest that men are very conscious of how they are constructing their identities in intimate relationships. In the absence of good parental role models, men will look to their peers for guidance on what successful relationships should look like.

In summary, the interviews with both men and women in this study show that young men and women critically reflect on how their vulnerable relationships with their parents have influenced and informed their current engagement in intimate relationships. For young adults, damaged and disconnected relationships with parents can result in them experiencing difficulties in how to conceptualise, initiate, negotiate and sustain healthy intimate relationships. Furthermore, young men and women from troubled homes can oftentimes feel disconnected and isolated from peers, resulting in them not actively seeking out opportunities for input and feedback.

#### **4. 2. Attending to structure**

As discussed in my introduction chapter, the metaphor of narrative emphasises that we create order and construct texts in particular contexts. Narrative analysis focuses on examining how a narrative is constructed and how a teller rhetorically creates it to make particular points (Riessman, 1993). Throughout the illustration and discussion of the thematic content areas in the previous section I also attended to narrative elements of discursive action - looking at ‘how’ and ‘why’ participants told their stories, and noting the details of their language use in interaction with me as interviewer. In this following

section I want to highlight two particular findings relating to the structure and word choice used by participants in their efforts to organise and construct their stories and to promote understanding and interpretation of their experiences.

#### ***4.2.1. Episodic and thematic retelling within a wider temporal framework***

As I explained in my methodology chapter, my unstructured interactive interviews were aimed at allowing participants the power and influence to determine where to begin their narrative, what topics to include or exclude, the order in which topics were introduced, the amount of detail, and the scope -, emotional intensity - and pacing of the interview.

The majority of the female participants with first-hand experience of intimate partner violence started their telling by positioning their narratives temporally and spatially - indicating the time and place when their intimate relationships began. However, as the telling progressed, these stories were stitched together by themes and episodes related to the emergence and progression of intimate partner violence. At various intervals women positioned certain themes and/or episodes within the context of the temporal and spatial progression of the relationship. These themes, and several episodes, were illustrated and discussed in the previous section of this chapter.

Across interviews, the female participants related episodes of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse in vivid and descriptive detail – actively recalling, describing and quoting what each person said and did in those situations. This discursive technique added dramatic detail - and emotional intensity - to their stories, and invited me as listener to fully imagine their experiences.

The methodological focus on ‘how’ young adults, in particular, talk about their experiences of intimate partner violence was not identified in my literature review, and therefore this study offers a new and important perspective in this regard. The episodic genre - housed within a wider temporal organisation - was a very effective discourse style that highlighted the dramatic and timeous unfolding of a series of thematic topics related to partner violence. This is in part similar to what was identified by Lempert (1997b) in her study focusing on the informal help-seeking overtures of women in outreach groups. In most cases, the women’s retelling was episodic and provided



significant insights into the history of their own developing awareness of the scope of the problem (Lempert, 1997b).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the women in my study with first-hand experiences of intimate partner violence all told retrospective stories of their abusive relationships – showing how their boyfriend/relationship changed in nature and over time. This recollective and reflective lens possibly aided both the episodic and/or temporal structuring of their experiences and understandings. Importantly - before, during or after reconstructing their experiences of IPV, the majority of the women made a point of telling me about the nature of their boyfriend and/or intimate relationship ‘in the beginning’ - prior to the onset of the abuse. Women described ‘perfect’ boyfriends who were “ideal”, “really sweet”, intelligent, charming, likeable and who carried the approval of their families. By doing so, women were able to show why they entered into relationships with these men in the first place. For some this ‘beginning’ signalled the start to their story of partner violence, and set the stage for what was to follow; for others, this was a significant or dramatic ‘middle’ or ‘end’ point to the story they were telling.

Despite intermittently drawing on a temporal framework to promote understandings of their experiences, the young women’s stories were not necessarily organised in a linear fashion (e.g. beginning, middle and end). Instead, they were often circular – centring around the focus on particular thematic episodes of abuse. This finding of non-linearity is consistent with that noted by Hydén (2007) in her work with women’s break-up narratives. Similarly, from a subject-position of having experienced abuse, Carter (2002) also points out that the recollections of her experiences do not knit together in a linear way, much in the same way that abuse is not always linear in all its facets. Furthermore, in her interviews with women who had left their abusive partners, Hydén (2007) found that the circularity of the women’s narratives often denoted a discontinuity in space and time. In contrast, it is important to note that despite the circular nature of their narratives, the young women in this study made active efforts to intermittently position their episodic telling within a temporal and spatial context – thereby achieving some sense of continuity. I gathered that it was important to the participants that I – as listener – understood that the episodes of violence did not happen in a vacuum.

The next extract is taken from the female focus group where Debbie, a 21 year-old White girl, begins to tell the other young women present about her experience with intimate partner violence. When asked at the start of the group for their reasons for wanting to participate, Debbie said the following: “I’ve just broken up with my boyfriend, and I wanted to talk about it, and the second reason is because it was my first really hectic relationship, and it went a bit pear-shaped at the end, and I thought maybe someone else could maybe help relate ‘cause I didn’t expect it to go like that”. In the following extract Debbie responds to an invitation from another group member that she tell the group about her experience.

Extract 46: Focus Group

- 1 Adele It sounds like there’s a lot to talk about. Where would you guys like to  
2 start?
- 3 Christina Well, let’s hear what Kris went through with her boyfriend...
- 4 Debbie I met this guy (.) so I started going out with him and it was, you know,  
5 sunshine and roses, everything was fantastic, you know,  
6 such a nice guy, first out of school relationship - you see him every  
7 day at varsity and it was, you know, very hectic. And it just went  
8 really fast, really quickly - he like came over for dinner all the time,  
9 every holiday we used to go visit the family, and every lecture we  
10 saw each other, every night he would either stay over or come for  
11 dinner, and it was like very hectic after like three months (.) and we  
12 fought, and when we fought it was like very passionate fights, but  
13 when we got on it was like very good - it was fine [...] so basically  
14 we had huge fights and then, on the abuse story, we got into a huge  
15 fight, and he actually hurt me, and I said to him, ‘if you care about me  
16 you wouldn’t do that, you can’t hurt someone that cares about you’,  
17 and now he’s very upset with me, and we haven’t really spoken (.)
- 18 Adele Do you want to tell us how he hurt you?
- 19 Debbie Oh, it was stupid, like he’s very (.) he’s not a very like athletic  
20 person, he plays sport and stuff, but (.) and he’s not much bigger than  
21 me at all, like basically same height - compared to other boyfriends  
22 I’ve had who were these huge rugby guys who I would have expected  
23 to be more physical, but weren’t (.) and yeah he’s very angry, he’s  
24 very angry, he’s like one of these who throws his toys and stuff at  
25 people (.) and I tried to calm him down, I like tried to put my hands  
26 on him and calm him down, and he had his back to me, and he turned  
27 around and he said - ‘don’t touch me’, and he grabbed my hand, and  
28 he threw my hand, and my wrist actually smashed against the door  
29 frame, and I (.) sprained my wrist, and I had this huge bump (.) and it  
30 wasn’t embarrassing, it was just really like you can’t explain, you  
31 can’t say - ‘I fell’, and it wasn’t that he hit me, but he did hurt me. So  
32 I couldn’t say to someone, ‘he like hit me’ you know, and you can’t  
33 say - ‘well he hurt me too’, because I was kind of like in the way? But  
34 that’s how (.) and then I spoke to someone about it, I was talking to a  
35 friend of mine who’s boyfriend used to hit her, and she said, that’s

36 what they do - they make it so that they didn't actually hit you - you  
 37 were in the way, you know (.) it was an accident, but the thing is it  
 38 wasn't, because he knew exactly what he was doing (.) and then there  
 39 was another time where - we hadn't really broken up and there was  
 40 another time when we had a fight and I was - I didn't punch him, but  
 41 I punched him – I was like 'how can you do this', you know like  
 42 when you get angry, and he like picked me up and like basically  
 43 threw me on the ground, and then I was just like, 'okay, I don't need  
 44 this anymore' (.) but it hurts because they're stronger than you, you  
 45 know, (.) but other than that I would never ever stand for it (.)

Debbie chooses to start her story with commenting on the initial nature of both her boyfriend and the relationship: in the beginning, the relationship was extraordinarily good and great (line 5, “fantastic”), and a source of cheerfulness, warmth and happiness (line 5, “sunshine and roses”); her boyfriend was “such a nice guy” (line 6), suggesting that he was agreeable, pleasant and kind in nature, and probably also socially or conventionally correct and respectable. Debbie then positions the relationship within a temporal context - it was her “first out of school relationship” (line 6) – indicating that it was a possibly auspicious timing for a new relationship.

In lines 6-11 Debbie uses various words and discursive techniques to convey how the relationship speedily intensified and progressed over time – a period of three months to be exact (line 11). By indicating the duration of the relationship at this point in her story, Debbie denotes a continuity in time and space. Furthermore, her use of the words “very hectic” (lines 7,11) alerts to this rapid movement and haste; it suggests that the relationship was characterised by intense activity and excitement, and that her contact with her boyfriend was habitual, pervasive and consumptive - they spent “every day” (lines 6-7), “every holiday” (line 9), “every lecture” (line 9) and “every night” (line 10) together. The repetition of the word “every” indicates that there was little or no exception to this pattern.

The word “hectic” (lines 7,11) also hints at heated interactions between Debbie and her boyfriend, and Debbie does talk about them having “passionate” (line 12) and “huge” (line 14) fights. Both the words “hectic” and “passionate” indicate that the relationship was marked by intense emotions, and that Debbie and/or her boyfriend were easily moved to anger or agitation. The word “huge” communicates that the size, amount, extent and/or scope of their disputes and battles were significant and immense.

In line 14, Debbie prefaces her telling of an episode of abuse by saying “and then, on the abuse story” – this is a story she has come to tell and probably also assumes others are expecting and wanting to hear; however, she only briefly and succinctly makes the point that her boyfriend “hurt” (lines 15,16) her. It is only after my question in line 18 that Debbie elaborates and proceeds to reconstruct the episode of abuse in detail (lines 19-34) – recalling her boyfriends emotions, words and actions, her reactions and the consequences of the abuse.

With her repetition of the word “hurt(s)” (lines 15,16,31,33,44), Debbie emphasises that she suffered injury, damage and harm from her boyfriend – despite him not being “much bigger” (line 20) than her, and despite the fact that he didn’t actually “hit” her (lines 31-32,36). Similarly to Debbie and Natasha (Appendix B), two other women in this study also alluded to their assumption or expectation that men who are physically big, sturdy and strong, are more likely to be physically intimidating and abusive, as compared to men who are not much bigger than their girlfriends. However, despite her boyfriend not being very “athletic” (line 19), Debbie points out that he is indeed a very “angry” (lines 23,24) and irascible man, and she understands that the harm he caused her was not “accidental” (lines 37-38), but intentional.

In lines 38-44, Debbie recalls “another time” (lines 39,40) – and tells of another episode of abuse; again she remembers exactly her words, actions and emotions, and her boyfriend’s reaction. In line 44, Debbie makes the general statement that men – and by implication, even men who are not physically very big - are “stronger” than women, and therefore their physical aggression can and does hurt. Given her last comment (line 45, “but other than that I would never ever stand for it”), it seems that it’s important for Debbie that we hear that she did not get hurt because she accepted or tolerated her boyfriend’s abuse, but because he was “stronger” (line 44) than her. By using the plural and third-person pronouns (line 44, “they’re stronger than you”), Debbie widens the focus away from her to include other women – women in the focus group, and women in general - thereby substantiating her argument.

In line 30, Debbie comments that, at the time, she couldn’t “explain” to others how she got injured and hurt in the absence of her boyfriend hitting her. Her talk in Extract 46 illustrates how Debbie tried to explain – and make sense of - it to the rest of us present in the focus group, and I would argue that she was successful in doing so.

## Extract 47: Feroza

- 1 Adele Tell me more about the experience you had  
 2 Feroza Okay, it was a relationship - started when I was 17, um, for about  
 3 3 years and (.) do you want me to say when the (.) what started,  
 4 I don't know how to start off (.)  
 5 Adele However you want to start...  
 6 Feroza Okay, the violence part, I suppose you're interested in that, um,  
 7 but that didn't come right away, it was a whole year and uh,  
 8 I'd say almost 2 years without any sign of that coming,  
 9 so it was unexpected (.) no warning signals  
 10 Adele No warning?  
 11 Feroza No warning signals, when it started - like little starting things, um  
 12 but before that no warning signals as to you are that type of  
 13 person, or as a guy being that type of person, I never saw anybody  
 14 as being that type of person, like I said it's like far away, so, that  
 15 was unexpected, but when it started um, I'd say it would start with,  
 16 you know, twisting my hand, maybe to start like that, very slow  
 17 process, very slow process, so it started with hands, a lot of  
 18 twisting, I remember there being a lot of twisting, it was quite a  
 19 while back, um, then it would move on to neck choking, yeah um  
 20 and then eventually enough of that went on, there was sort of  
 21 banging - head against wall, slapping, and that would be the worst  
 22 that it got, smacking banging head against the wall type of thing  
 23 (.) yeah, so that would be the process, and that happened sort of  
 24 like over a period of a year (.)  
 25 Adele So it started slowly and then got worse over time?  
 26 Feroza Yes, there was pushing, shoving, pushing, shoving and a lot of,  
 27 you, you know, hurting me, twisting my hands, squeezing (.)  
 28 that would be the beginning part, so it would start off very slow  
 29 and I would think of it as nothing, you know? But obviously,  
 30 because you see it as nothing (.) but it's something, but as it goes  
 31 on, it gets more severe, you obviously start to think this is not  
 32 normal.

Although Feroza (Extract 47) has come to tell a story, she is hesitant and unsure about “how to start off” (line 4) telling about her experience. With a complex issue like intimate partner violence, it seems difficult for Feroza to unambiguously name her experience and to identify ‘a beginning’ to her story; she struggles to find the right starting place, and looks to me for an indication as to what I want to hear.

In lines 2-8, Feroza begins her telling by using a temporal and spatial framework – she identifies how old she was at the start of her relationship (17 years old), indicates the duration of the relationship (“about three years”), and soon after notes when the violence came into the relationship (after “almost 2 years”). It’s important to Feroza that

she explain to me that there was a long period in the relationship that did not involve the violence, and that it's entry into the relationship was sudden and unforeseen (lines 9,15, "unexpected"); there were no indications or "warning signals" (lines 9,11,12) alerting her to - or preparing her for - it. This underscores the fact that, prior to the violence, there was a different relationship history and experience that held meaning, and that it was in this context that the violence intruded.

After some hesitation, Feroza chooses to start her story by telling about "the violence part" (line 6). By assuming that that's the story I am "interested" (line 6) to hear, Feroza is clearly also responding to her assumptions about my expectations and agenda as interviewer. Therefore, the interactive context is central in Feroza's decision-making about how to start telling her story. Therefore, it is not to say that the "violence part" (line 6) was necessarily considered by Feroza herself as the most important or relevant place to start her story.

Not only had Feroza not expected her boyfriend to become violent, but at the time, she could not even have imagined "anybody" (line 13) as being "that type of person" (lines 12-13,14). She doesn't specifically name what she means by this phrase, but the implication is someone who is abusive and violent by nature and in character. Feroza could not conceive or predict that something as remote and removed (line 14, "far away") as physical abuse could intrude into the personal and familiar domain.

Feroza starts to tell about the physical abuse by focusing on how and when 'it started' (lines 3,11,15,16,17,28). This starting point clearly demarcates a critical moment in the relationship; in her retrospective telling, it is at this point where her relationship as she knew it changed forever, and she was faced with a new story – the story of intimate partner violence. Her talk about men or people in general, as well as her impersonal reference to the abuse as "it" (lines 11,15,17,19,22,28,30,31), with no mention of 'him' - her boyfriend, perpetrating the violent acts - possibly indicates her need to distance and detach herself from fully connecting with the subjective and intimate details of the story.

Feroza proceeds to describe the nature of the physical abuse in more detail. At this stage of recollection, it seems that Feroza is choosing to tell about the abuse in a rather disengaged and matter-of-fact manner; this possibly indicates her need for control in

remembering the abuse. It's noteworthy that she continues not to name - or even discursively imply the presence of - her boyfriend.

Throughout her interview Feroza did use the episodic genre to tell about her experiences with intimate partner violence; many of these thematic episodes were illustrated in the previous section in this chapter. However, throughout Extract 47 (taken from the beginning of our interview conversation), Feroza continues to underscore the temporal and spatial organisation underlying her experience of IPV. The abuse started "very slow" (lines 16,17,28) and gradually increased in severity "over a period of a year" (line 24). Therefore, although there is a striking difference between the twisting of hands, and neck choking or head banging, this progression took time and did not happen over night; although the details of the physical violence are dramatic and frightening, these episodes did not occur suddenly or in isolation. Rather, the violence unfolded as a "process" (line 17) – indicating that there was a systematic and continuous series of violent acts taking place over a period of time, and directed to some end.

In talking about the abuse, Feroza uses the repetition of words and phrases (line 26, "pushing, shoving, pushing, shoving"; lines 17-18, "so it started with hands, a lot of twisting, I remember there being a lot of twisting"). Her discursive technique here conveys the repetitive, persistent, and relentless nature of physical abuse.

Feroza alludes to the manipulative and deceptive power of abuse: in "the beginning" (line 28) it started off so "very slow" (lines 16,17,28) – possibly taking a long time for Feroza to register it as significant, consequential and alarming. As her boyfriend's violence became more severe, Feroza started to consider this "nothing" (line 29) as "something" (line 30), and eventually came to regard it as "not normal" (lines 31-31). Ironically, and unfortunately, partner violence is not an abnormal, uncommon or unexceptional experience for women today. Feroza's use of the third-person pronoun 'you' in lines 30-32 (line 30, "you see it as nothing") helps her to generalise her meaning-making to include myself and other women, and to possibly protect her from any judgement to the contrary.

Extract 48: Feroza

1 Adele Thinking back to those incidents of physical abuse, how do you  
2 remember them?

- 3 Feroza I remember some of them in detail, I remember the last bad one in  
4 detail, complete detail.
- 5 Adele What happened?
- 6 Feroza I think it was about, it could be like four to five months ago, um, he  
7 had wanted some time away, or some time off, just to, we had many  
8 times away from each other, just not speaking for a few days, and so  
9 he had told me not to come and speak to him basically, but then I had  
10 seen him, and I went to go and say 'hi' and he said - and that was it, I  
11 just said 'hi' and then I said 'I'm going to class now', and I went to  
12 class, and there were other people around and so he didn't say  
13 anything to me as I left, but the point was that he told me not to come  
14 to him, this - as he explained to me afterwards - was the point, he told  
15 me not to come to him, and I disobeyed that and actually saw him and  
16 said 'hi' - that was the problem, he said that that was the problem. So  
17 as I went to class, I was in class, and he came and he singled me to  
18 come outside, and um (.) he just immediately pushed me against the  
19 wall and he sort of took his hand on me and he banged my head  
20 against the wall, very hard, because it was aching and then he  
21 smacked me around a bit, and that was sort of what happened, yeah,  
22 that's what happened.

In the previous extract (Extract 47), Feroza tells me that although the abuse took place “quite a while back” (line 18-19) - she can “remember” (line 18). Certainly, young women in this study with first-hand experiences of IPV recollected and reconstructed their memories of violent episodes in plenty of detail – recalling words, actions, reactions, emotions and consequences of the abuse. This finding supports existing literature (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005a), that has shown that women remember, reconstruct and narrate their memories of violent events from a level of ‘knowledge’ - with complete details of the event.

In Extract 48, Feroza tells me that she can remember the last “bad” (line 3) violent incident in “complete detail” (line 4) – suggesting that the traumatic nature of it has resulted in her remembering and reliving the experience. When I ask her to tell me what happened, Feroza remembers the time, timing, place and context of the violent episode, and can recall the step-by-step consequential unfolding of what happened. Feroza can also clearly remember what her boyfriend’s instructions were; she can fully describe his explanation of “the problem” (line 16), and what, according to him, she had done wrong. Her use of the word “disobeyed” (line 15) implies that Feroza had refused - or failed to - comply with her boyfriend’s demands, and that she transgressed his rules. Later in her interview, Feroza further elaborated on her reconstruction of this particular experience by including a retrospective and reflective awareness and description of her cognitive processes at the time. She remembered identifying the anger on her



boyfriend's face when he signalled her outside the classroom, and her realisation that he had purposefully come to hurt and punish her for her violation of his instructions. However, by focusing on naming the emotions she identified in her boyfriend, Feroza was able to partly distance herself from the emotions she felt at the time of this violent incident.

As explained by Enosh and Buchbinder (2005a), people give meaning to their experiences of trauma and violence through the construction of memory. In their attempts to integrate their experiences, participants in this study were likely torn between their need (and my request) to recollect and process their traumatic memories, and their need to distance themselves and forget or detach from the pain and threat associated with these memories. However, by reconstructing their memories of the abuse, the young women in this study were to some extent able to control what has happened to them, and to offer their commentary on the events.

In summary, the findings from this study contribute new and important understandings of how young women remember and organise their retrospective stories of intimate partner violence. The young women in this study chose to reconstruct and narrate their experiences of partner violence in ways that allowed them to remain engaged with – and connected to – their memories and experiences. Furthermore, women across interviews relied on two very effective structural frameworks in organising and telling about their experiences of intimate partner violence – a temporal/spatial framework, and an episodic/thematic framework.

Throughout their narratives the women intermittently used a temporal and spatial framework to indicate time, place, duration and progression of partner violence. These references to time and space enabled women to place their experiences in context, and to achieve a sense of narrative continuity. However, the use of temporal references did not necessarily result in linear narratives. Rather, narratives were mostly circular in nature, and were stitched together by episodes that underscored important themes. Importantly, these two organising frameworks worked very well together, and the narratives of the young women in this study highlighted the dramatic and timeous unfolding and progression of a series of episodes and thematic topics related to intimate partner violence.

The findings from this study support the suggestions made by Hydén (2007) in her narrative research with abused women, i.e. that as research interviewers we should aim to offer participants a discursive space that invites and respects their use of different temporal frameworks, and we should not discipline the telling of participants into traditional linear lines (e.g. beginning, middle and end). Rather, the research interview should be flexible in allowing interviewees to develop, organise and articulate their understandings as they see fit.

#### ***4.2.2. Telling about the “small things”***

The particular word choice of “small things” was a common discursive and linguistic resource used by all the women who told about their personal experiences of intimate partner violence. Women spoke about the subtle emergence and insidious progression of emotional abuse and/or physical aggression in their intimate relationships, and were, in retrospect, able to - identify the “small things” that accumulated and evolved into larger dynamics and patterns of partner violence. Looking back, these women were able to note the ultimate significance and impact of these ‘small things’.

Women recounted specific actions, observations, criticisms and requests on the part of their boyfriend that were characterised by jealousy, possessiveness, control and/or manipulation; these interactions often resulted in “stupid fights”. For example: women were criticised and blamed for making even the most minimal contact (e.g. eye-contact) with other men; boyfriends complained about their partner’s ‘inappropriate’ dress out in public; boyfriends constantly monitored their girlfriend’s whereabouts; women were blamed for their boyfriend’s anger outbursts; boyfriends drove recklessly to frighten their girlfriends; and boyfriends were physically forceful during ‘affectionate play’ and physical intimacy.

These women spoke about constantly monitoring and accommodating their boyfriend’s needs and feelings, and adapting their behaviour accordingly. At the time these compromises seemed insignificant, trifle and of minor importance and consequence in the grand scheme of the relationship. Women often made successions, and placated their boyfriend in these situations in order to divert attention away from unnecessary, petty and niggling arguments or confrontations. Furthermore through choosing to avert - and

negotiate around - these “small things”, women felt they were able to control their boyfriend and his behaviour, as well as focus on the future of the relationship.

Ironically, these “small things” were inevitably not minor or silly at all, and were in actual fact quite substantial and alarming; “small things” added up to big and significant things – such as isolation from friends and family, and major compromises in the women’s expressions of identity, personal power and preferences.

Extract 49: Focus Group

- 1 Debbie I used to be very like my father - very outspoken, very boisterous,  
 2 I used to have a big ego, I used to be like - I'd flirt, the whole story,  
 3 like totally extroverted, confident, you know, I went on exchange, I  
 4 went overseas, I got all these things just with my confidence and my  
 5 personality (.) and in the year of this relationship we had, I'm an  
 6 absolute emotional wreck - I think I'm ugly, I feel like I have  
 7 difficulty making friends now, just because he always made me - like  
 8 he would never let me wear this, or he'd never let me go out with my  
 9 friends (.) not controlling, but little small things that over a year I  
 10 now see the difference from me a year ago in first year - like so  
 11 excited to be in first year - to now (.) My mom even used to say to  
 12 me, why are you being like this, this is not you, this is not you, you  
 13 know? But like, it wasn't always like that, you know. You think of  
 14 the good things (.) it was good, you know, but every now and again  
 15 we'd have a fight and then (.) I'm a very strong person and then I'd  
 16 always have to compromise trying to make him happy (.) and by the  
 17 end I'd compromised my entire personality away - and I was just  
 18 like - 'there's nothing left anymore - enough now'
- 19 Thandi With me it wasn't really physical, it's more (.) you don't see things  
 20 when you're with the person, until you actually break up with him,  
 21 and you're like - 'but wait a minute', you know, when you start  
 22 reflecting back on everything (.) and it's small things like (.) sort of  
 23 like the same thing as Debbie (.) I'm very talkative, and I make friends  
 24 very easily, and the guy I was dating was a bit of an introvert type of  
 25 person (.) so it was like small things like - don't go out, don't do this,  
 26 because you're gonna upset me - and I'm like - okay, because I  
 27 don't really wanna get into another fight (.) so it was just small  
 28 things like that [...]
- 29 Debbie The thing for me was - 'don't go out with your guy friends'
- 30 Christina With my guy friends - he's convinced they're all after me, and any  
 31 attention I give them is like - 'because I want them' - it's ridiculous
- 32 Thandi Ja, you put up with small things - like I tried to compromise [...] I  
 33 had to be constantly checking in with him (.)
- 34 Arina Mom's enough!
- 35 Thandi 'And my mom isn't even as bad as you are, what's your problem?'
- 36 Debbie Did he ever tell you to not like wear things?
- 37 Christina Yeah, my boyfriend told me not to wear mini-skirts.
- 38 Thandi It's small things, and they irritate you at the time, and you fight

- 39                    about it - like you say, 'I don't like it when you say things like this or  
 40                    when you did this or that', 'okay, sorry, I didn't mean to' (.) and then  
 41                    you tend to overlook it 'cause it's nothing, it's not in your face  
 42                    abuse, it's just very subtle.  
 43    Debbie        But it's honestly the most stupid things

Rather than interpret it as the women trying to minimise or deny their boyfriend's abuse, this extract from the focus group (Extract 49) illustrates how women used the phrase "small things" (lines 9,22,25,27-28,32,38) as a discursive and linguistic resource to promote understanding and interpretation of their experiences.

In her talk (lines 1-18), Debbie emphasises the accumulative impact of 'small things' (over a period of one year) by highlighting the contrast between her previous and current personality and levels of confidence; hence, "little small things" (line 9) resulted in Debbie changing from being a strong, outgoing, energetic, confident and flirtatious woman, to her feeling emotionally ruined (lines 5-6, "I'm an absolute emotional wreck"), and wasted (line 18, "there's nothing left anymore"). Debbie also reminds the listeners in the group that these 'small things' happened only intermittently (line 14, "every now and again"), and in the context of "good things" (line 14) – possibly making it difficult for her to understand her boyfriend as generally "controlling" (line 9). Input from all the women in this interaction point to the annoying and irritating nature of these 'small things'; Debbie captures this by describing it as "the most stupid things" (line 43) – conveying how foolish and senseless her boyfriend's demands were.

Women across interviews – who had experienced emotional abuse only – were quick to point out the lack of physical abuse in their relationships. As suggested by Thandi, this lack of physical abuse resulted in women not considering their experience as "in your face abuse" (lines 41-42), i.e. they did not interpret their interactions with their boyfriends as obviously confrontational, threatening or scornful. Many women described their boyfriend's emotional abuse as "subtle" (line 42) – in part communicating how cunning, deceptive and elusive it was, as well as insidious – operating in a hidden, but injurious, manner. Women were probably also responding to what they imagined the judgement of others would be, i.e. that they didn't manage to - recognise the abuse, or - leave their abusive relationships timeously.

Of the five women who participated in the focus group, the four that had a first-hand experience with intimate partner violence all participated in the interaction illustrated in

Extract 49. These women spontaneously made direct links between their experiences, and could easily identify with – and respond to - the similarities in their stories. Later in the focus group, the women joked with each other that their boyfriends should all get together and “write a script” about their abuse – suggesting that the subtext, scenarios, plots and characters in their individual stories were alike and comparable to each other.

Extract 50: Felicia

1 Felicia Um, he’s never hit me, um, like there was (.) he made me scared, um,  
2 and then there was like small things, like he’d say, I don’t know, like,  
3 like he’d push me down on the bed or he’d push me around, or  
4 whatever and ever, but it was things like that, but it was nothing like  
5 hitting or anything (.)

Extract 51: Thandi

1 Thandi You become so on guard with small things that you do (.) you’re  
2 sitting with a bomb so you walk around it, you don’t wanna do  
3 anything that you think might put you in direct contact with it

The above two extracts illustrate how dangerous and frightening these “small things” (Extract 50, line 2; Extract 51, line 1) can be for women. Although he never hit her (Extract 50, lines 1,4-5) – something that she would have found major and alarming - Felicia was frightened by her boyfriend; his physical aggression and intimidation - although considered by Felicia to be “small things” - certainly were not trivial or insignificant.

In Extract 51, Thandi communicates the importance of being vigilant, wary and cautious of “small things” in efforts to keep herself safe from harm and danger. The metaphor of “sitting with a bomb” (line 2) is powerful in communicating a sense of the ongoing tension and anxiety she must feel in relation to her boyfriend’s unpredictable behaviour. Later in her interview, Thandi spoke of how she had learned to appease her boyfriend in order to avoid escalation that would result in conflict - for example, she told him “half-truths” in efforts to anticipate and control his reactions. Thandi’s ability to anticipate and avert potential danger is consistent with existing literature (Langford, 1996), showing that an important way in which women actively cope with - and manage - abuse in their relationships is by ‘predicting unpredictability’. This theory emphasises the simultaneous, circular and ongoing nature of abused women’s perceptions and

monitoring of danger in interactions with abusive partners, in order to reduce the risk of harm to themselves and others (Langford, 1998).

Across interviews, the women's talk also invited several other readings of the word "small": women were made to feel 'small' by their partners who criticised, shamed, manipulated and blamed them in abusive interactions; some women commented on their boyfriends' immaturity and small-mindedness – here the word 'small' captured the littleness and narrowness of mind and character. Nevertheless, at the time of these interactions, the women were invested in making their relationships succeed, and made conscious and active efforts to accommodate and bypass these "small things".

Extract 52: Feroza

- 1 Adele And how did you initially respond when the control came into the  
2 relationship?  
3 Feroza Um, I probably, I remember fighting for my side of it, but it would  
4 end up being (.) he's either saying, 'well, then this is not gonna work  
5 out, go', and I didn't want that to happen, so I let the little things  
6 slide, to avoid a break up, to avoid us now breaking up over the fact  
7 that I want to speak to this guy - that's, you know, in my head, that's  
8 silly, this guy can go, it's ok, I can ask a girl about this project or  
9 something - so that's how it would start, around small things, and  
10 then by the end it comes to a huge thing and I don't have any leverage  
11 anymore, so, that's how it happened.

Initially in response to her boyfriend's control, Feroza (Extract 52) recalls "fighting" for her "side of it" (line 3): this conveys that Feroza argued and disagreed with her boyfriend's point of view, and defended her position on certain matters; hence, there was a conflict and struggle for power in the relationship.

Feroza illustrates how her boyfriend would threaten to end their relationship over "small" (line 9), "silly" (line 8) and "little" (line 5) things. Feroza's talk suggests that her boyfriend responded in irrational and almost absurd ways (lines 7-8, "in my head that's silly"), to matters that seemed of very minor importance at the time – and which she felt had no consequence for the future of the relationship. In these situations, Feroza made a conscious decision "to let the little things slide" (lines 5-6); in an attempt to move things along peacefully and smoothly, she stopped actively contesting - and intervening in - her boyfriend's arguments over foolish issues. However, this resulted in Feroza losing "leverage" (line 10) in the relationship; by the time her boyfriend's

dynamic around these small things became an obvious and significant problem (line 10, “a huge thing”), Feroza had lost the power to act on - or influence - him, events and decisions in the relationship.

In summary, the young women in this study emphasised that their boyfriend’s increased power and control in the relationship happened gradually – through the accumulative impact and insidious dynamic of seemingly insignificant “small things”. Women explained that they consciously altered or adapted their behaviour in attempts to manage and protect the relationship, avert future conflict, and focus on the important aspects of the relationship. In light of this purpose, the sacrifices, concessions and compromises made by women seemed of minor consequence and importance at the time.

Women’s talk of “small things” was a very powerful discursive and linguistic resource across all 11 interviews with female participants who had first-hand experiences of intimate partner violence. This finding adds a new and important perspective to the literature on young adults and intimate partner violence, and elucidates how young women understand, interpret and present their experiences and meaning-making of intimate partner violence.

### **4.3. Attending to the telling moment**

The results of this study support the argument made by Kraus (2006) that narratives are a multifaceted resource for the understanding of self-construction. In order to understand this construction, it was important and helpful to analyse the relationships between the participants as tellers and myself as listener, the context and processes of the telling, as well as the content and structure of these self-stories. In this section I attend to the telling moment by considering the following: motivations for telling about experience; the context of the telling; and telling as performance and interaction.

#### ***4.3.1. Motivations for telling about experience***

In response to my first interview question of why they were motivated to participate in this research study, and to come and talk about intimate relationships and intimate partner violence, the women and men in this study expressed a range of motivations.

Their reason(s) for participation communicated their goals and intentions for seeking out the interaction of the research interview.

Four female participants explicitly commented on how they valued, and identified with, the research and academic endeavour – these women sought out the experience of being an ‘interviewee’, and wanted to contribute their participation to the process. Several women and men wanted to share their views and perspectives on intimate relationships and IPV, and believed their inputs could be helpful to peers and the other audiences. These adults expressed their general awareness of - and concern about – intimate partner violence in South African society; they wanted to underscore the importance of focusing on the issue, and position themselves in relation to it. The majority of female participants in this study noted the silence regarding intimate partner violence - their own, and that of others - and came to tell their personal story of abuse, often for the first time. Two women had recently started to re-evaluate a past intimate relationship, and were questioning the possibility of it having been ‘abusive’ - the research interview therefore offered them an opportunity to bring this internal dialogue into an interactive and discursive space. Another two women felt they had not fully processed - and made meaning of - past experiences of abuse, and expressed an interest in talking to a psychologist about it. These women noted their need for an ‘outside’ perspective on their experiences, and possibly anticipated that the interview could be an enlightening, supportive and therapeutic experience for them.

With regards the one focus group, women came to tell about their experiences with “hectic”, “intense” and “serious” intimate relationships – all of them had recently ended these relationships, and anticipated that others might be able to relate to - and help them make sense of - their experiences. The women expressed their interest in hearing the perspectives of other young women, and to collectively give attention to the important issue of intimate partner violence.

The following is an extract from the start of my interview with Feroza, a 20 year old Coloured girl, who later told about her experiences with severe physical and emotional abuse in her relationship with her ex-boyfriend.

Extract 53: Feroza



- 1 Adele Let's start by you telling me why you were interested to come and  
2 participate in this interview.
- 3 Feroza Okay, well as you said it was a study, so I know students do  
4 PhD's and they obviously need some help in research, a lot of  
5 help, I heard a lot about that and I'm interested in the subject  
6 because I have personal experience and I, since nobody – I never  
7 ever had information on it, and nobody spoke to me about it, so if  
8 other people can read your study, and hear about it, then I'd feel  
9 as if I gave something, so that's why.
- 10 Adele So it can be meaningful for you to give something of your own  
11 experience, and for others to learn from that?
- 12 Feroza Yeah exactly, because I never heard of anybody telling me about  
13 it, I never heard about it, you always hear about it far away, or  
14 movies or, you don't think it can happen to you or somebody  
15 close to you because it just doesn't feel like that

In response to my question, Feroza (Extract 53), expresses her motivations for choosing to come and participate in this interview. She indirectly identifies my position and role as a PhD “student” (line 3) and researcher (line 4) – she acknowledges that PhD students in general need “a lot of help” (lines 4-5), and implies that she will be able to provide me with that much needed help. She's possibly indicating that she will be able to assist me in learning about – and studying “the subject” (line 5), and to gain a better insight into - and understanding of - “it” (lines 7,8,13,14). Accordingly, Feroza immediately positions herself as someone who has “personal experience” (line 6) with - and subjective knowledge of - this issue. Feroza's talk here alludes to the transactional dynamic inherent in interview interactions, where the exercise of power is a characteristic of both the interviewer and interviewee. The power of me as interviewer rests in my authority as a seeker of knowledge and methodological expertise, and that of Feroza, the interviewee, as a more or less privileged knower (Nunukoosing, 2005).

As discussed earlier in my methodology chapter, the relation between me as researcher and the participants was a central epistemological issue in my study. In line with a relational turn in qualitative research, I supported the construction of the researcher-researched relation as one between two ‘knowing subjects’ (Smith & Deemer, 2003, cited in Gunzenhauser, 2006) – who construct meaning together.

It is noteworthy that throughout Extract 53, Feroza is yet to name the subject she's referring to; she's proceeding on the inherent assumption that she and I both know what she has come to talk about – and what “it” (lines 7,8,13,14) refers to - i.e. intimate

partner violence. Given her subjective experience, Feroza comments on her interest in this matter (lines 5-6) - this communicates that her attention, concern and curiosity is particularly engaged by it. From this position of involvement, Feroza highlights the silence and disengagement she has experienced around this issue. Rather than make a generalised comment, Feroza repeats that “nobody” (lines 6,7) has directly engaged in the act of “telling” (line 12) her about it (lines 7,12-13). By repeating her use of the verb ‘hear’ (lines 8,12,13), Feroza underlines the fact that stories of IPV are often not told, and therefore not heard. Instead, the concept of partner violence has been portrayed at a distance in “movies” (line 14), or is only heard about in removed and abstract ways (line 13, “far away”); this implies that IPV is never heard and seen up “close” (line 14) and personal. Given the silence and isolation which she has experienced, and knowing that intimate partner violence can happen, and did happen, to her - Feroza expresses her motivation to contribute her voice of knowledge and experience; she anticipates that it could be helpful and meaningful for others to hear and read about her story.

Certainly, abuse is a category of events that is often silenced in the most basic terms. Not only were the majority of women’s individual stories of intimate partner violence not heard by many, but their cultures and families often conspired to erase these kinds of experiences from the women’s cultural landscape of possible experiences. Hence, their traumatic experiences with partner violence were silenced by others as too dangerous to think or talk about (Fivush, 2003). Given the silence and discomfort that many women experienced in this regard, I could better understand why it was hard for some of them to name their experience in so many words. Nevertheless, as young adults living with intimate partner violence, these women (and one man) had to come to tell their stories of intimate partner violence to someone, and they chose to do so in these interviews – often telling their stories for the first time. As suggested by Lawless (2001), their decisions on how to tell – and create - their stories would have a significant effect on their lives.

In her research with African-American female survivors of abuse, Taylor (2002) found that research participation can be a potential avenue of resistance and healing for these women. My sense across interviews in my study was that – for both young women and men with and without first-hand experience of intimate partner violence - participation in this research offered opportunities for the expression of resistance and empowerment. In opposition to the silence surrounding their experiences of violence, women’s

participation in the interviews was perhaps a symbolic way of talking back to - the boyfriends who abused them, - the fathers who abused their mothers, - and the families and silent communities who refused to acknowledge the problem of intimate partner violence. By claiming a voice, women were given the authority to tell their stories from their perspectives, thus, their versions of the truth became privileged over others; in this way, they were using their voice as a form of power (Fivush, 2003). Furthermore, the design of the research interview was aimed at giving centrality to the participant's experiences, subjectivity and authenticity, thereby also facilitating processes of transformation and healing (Davis & Taylor, 2006).

Certainly, for several women and men in the study, coming to terms with the pervasiveness of intimate partner violence fostered a sense of connectedness, ownership and social responsibility, and this supported their efforts to speak out, talk back, and participate in telling their stories via research interviews (Taylor, 2002). For instance, several male participants explicitly positioned themselves in opposition to patriarchal social structures that attempt to maintain women in positions of silence and subjugation. As suggested by Taylor (2002), participation in narrative research about violence might be a less visible form of political activism, yet an equally important form of resistance.

Over the course of their interviews, it became clear that several participants sought out this interaction in their efforts to increase their reflexivity, sense of personal agency and self-efficacy – this in turn helped clarify their thoughts, support their desire for change, and increased their belief in their ability to successfully take action in their best interests (Patzel, 2001).

In summary, men and women responded to this research study with purposeful motive and intention; therefore, the unstructured narrative interview style I adopted was important and necessary in enabling these participants to express and pursue their initial goals and interests. The rationale for – and application of - this particular methodological stance in research on young adults and intimate partner violence was not identified in my literature review, and the findings from this study certainly support its value and relevance.

Importantly, two central issues were identified across the range of motivations offered by the participants in this study: firstly, young adults expressed their desire and

willingness to voice their knowledges and experiences of intimate relationships and intimate partner violence – to myself and other potential audiences. Secondly, the male and female participants were trying to make meaning of – and integrate – these experiences and knowledges into their own relational identities, and consciously sought out the discursive interview space in which to do so.

#### ***4.3.2. The context of the telling***

Throughout this thesis I have made attempts to maintain both a positional and methodological reflexivity. As I discussed in Chapter 3, my objective was to provide an ongoing metanarrative in my writings - where the reader could identify my authorial voice remarking on and considering the research project itself, taking measure of my own epistemological and methodological positions, my relationships with the participants, the social and political location of the topic, and otherwise reflecting and reporting on the research work and process.

This emphasis on reflexivity and my positioning and representation as researcher in the research process, has enabled me to remain mindful of the multiple constitutive factors that contributed to the production and creation of the results. In line with this stance, it is important to consider the context in which the participants' telling took place, as well as the constitutional reflexivities of the research interview itself.

I'll first make a few comments with regards the latter: similar to Macbeth's exhibit (2001) of an interaction between students and a teacher, one can think of the individual research interview as a social constructive exercise, with an identifying order and occasion-relevant identities. Both myself as interviewer, and the participants as interviewees, analysed and interpreted what the other person present made of their questions and comments, and reflexively revealed our analyses in our subsequent questions and/or remarks. In this sense, our talk was itself reflexively tied to the production of the discourse in the room. The participants and I therefore jointly produced and implicated one another in our understandings of the occasion of the research interview; in the developing detail and interactional dynamics of our ongoing dialogue, we reflexively assembled the order and structure of the interview event. Therefore, as interviewer and interviewee, we were the first reflexive analysts on the scene (Macbeth, 2001).

With regards the context of the telling: first, there was the immediate communicative context of these research interviews in which participants' talk functioned to present themselves to me as the other person present (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005). This was influenced, not only by the questions I asked during the interviews, but also by the initial presentation of the research project and the setting up of this particular encounter (Mischler, 1999). It is also important to consider the location of the interviews.

As described in my methodology chapter, students were informed that the study was aimed at better understanding how young people view, experience and talk about intimate/romantic relationships and intimate partner violence. It was explained that students did not necessarily have to have had personal experiences of IPV in order to be a participant. As noted earlier, this decision to include participants who had not personally experienced IPV was consistent with the premise that understandings regarding IPV stem from a range of sources and experiences.

The interviews took place in my office at the University of Cape Town's 'Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health' at Groote-Schuur Hospital - this is mostly an academic setting housed within a tertiary medical hospital. Aside from a single lecture on intimate partner violence to a group of students in the hospital (from which 2 women volunteered participation in the study), I did not have previous or ongoing student-staff relations or contact with any of the participants. However, the relationship between student and lecturer is one of many nuances to be mindful of in this interaction.

Given the institutional setting of the university, as well as the academic and clinical setting of the hospital in which the interviews took place, it is important to consider issues of power and hierarchy that are inevitably inherent in several interpretations of the relationship between the participants and myself, e.g.: student-lecturer; client-therapist; subject-researcher; and interviewee and interviewer. In inviting their participation, I positioned myself as a researcher first and foremost; I communicated to the participants that I was interested in their experiences and understandings of relationships and the issue of IPV, and that I considered their knowledges to be very important and valid. As discussed in Chapter 3, my intent was to listen carefully and take seriously the perspective of young adults, and to empower them as the experts and interpreters of their own experience.

In addition to positioning myself as a researcher and interviewer, the participants understood that I was a Clinical Psychologist and therapist. This possibly added a psychological and therapeutic context to the research interview encounter, and could have influenced both their language-use and the subtext of how some participants chose to perform their identity. Given that the majority of participants were students aspiring to similar or related Health Sciences professions, and given that I was only about 10 years older than the average participant, participants were possibly able to relate to - and identify with - my various identities and roles as young woman, psychologist, academic, researcher and clinician.

In addition to the immediate communicative context, my discussion throughout this chapter also considered how participants talked against certain assumptions, stereotypes and criticisms (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005) which they have experienced - or anticipated - in relation to the topic of intimate partner violence. Furthermore, the questions I asked in these interviews were to some extent also informed and influenced by my own knowledges and assumptions of IPV. For instance - as a woman, a clinical psychologist, a narrative therapist and researcher - what were/are my preferred stories with regards to intimate partner violence? Certainly, I have always been very mindful and cautious of how psychiatric discourses and identities with regards 'Domestic Violence' and 'Battered Women' influence and shape what and how women tell about their personal experiences of IPV. One aspect of my preferred interpretive stance as a psychologist is respecting the subjective knowledges that women have about their experiences, and supporting them in unpacking and naming the nature and impact of the abuse.

Therefore, the interviews in this study did not only involve interactions between the participants and myself – but also included those meanings and arguments that both of us brought to this “communicative event” (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b, p.589). As mentioned throughout my thesis, as interviewer, I was constantly mindful of my active and constitutive role in - and contribution to - the process of narrative production. However, I tried to offer participants a discursive space that allowed them to tell (and me to hear) the stories they came to tell. I was mindful of allowing their stories to unfold in the relational moment of the interview, versus trying to get the story ‘out there’. I made a conscious attempt to more actively take on the role of researcher versus that of psychologist – it reminded me to be ignorant about what I was hearing, and to be

careful not to ‘discipline’ the memory or telling of participants (Hydén, 2007) according to my knowledges of intimate partner violence. However, evaluations of events do not happen in isolation, and in my subsequent analysis of the results, I have been able to more clearly identify where - and understand how - my assumptions and meaning-making influenced the interactions.

#### ***4.3.3. Telling as performance and interaction***

Throughout the discussion of the results in this chapter I have highlighted, where relevant, two central issues related to the ‘telling’ of the women and men in this study: the important interactive context of their stories, and the investments the young men and women had in how their talk achieved certain self-presentation and interactional goals. In this section I will add a few general comments related to these two dimensions of ‘telling as performance and interaction’, and present an extract from an interview that illustrates the importance of considering the intersubjective context in which telling takes place.

##### **4.3.3.1. The interactive process of telling**

Both the female and male participants in this study impressed me with their willingness to engage with the interactive process of the interview – the men and women were candid, self-reflective and co-operative, and were keen to explore and negotiate their (and my) understandings and meaning-making of issues. On the whole, I found the interaction between myself and participants to be characterised by co-operation and negotiation on both sides. Participants were receptive to the inputs I shared as interviewer, and were willing to engage in processes of self-reflection and recollection. I chose to be transparent about my understandings and meaning-making of issues, and made a conscious effort to do so in ways that facilitated reflection, negotiation and elaboration, as opposed to creating struggle (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b). This scope for negotiation was illustrated by several participants who felt able to debate and present a definition of reality that differed from mine – suggesting that they felt respected and empowered to do so.

In the one focus group, the women communicated directly and openly with one another, and took ownership of - and responsibility for - the interactive group process. They actively listened, explored and validated each other’s stories with probes, questions and

thoughtful comments – inviting me to take on the role of listener and observer to their participation and interaction.

#### **4.3.3.2. Telling as self-presentation and performance**

The results from several of the thematic content areas discussed earlier in this chapter, (in particular the following themes: ‘Naming - and talking about - the abuse: Implications for self-presentation’; ‘Protecting reputations and identities’; ‘Intimate partner violence: “It really can happen to anyone”’; and ‘Absence of help-seeking efforts’), - emphasised that young women in particular performed their stories of intimate partner violence (to me and others) in ways that accomplished and indexed their preferred identities and self-presentation objectives. These results therefore underscore the importance of looking beyond ‘content’ and fully analysing the narratives of young adults.

Women had specific self-presentation goals in how they chose to name – and talk about - their experiences of intimate partner violence. It seemed important for the majority of the young women in this study that they presented themselves as insightful, empowered and capable women – despite, and even as a result of, these experiences. Having already left their abusive relationships, these young women aspired to be confident, independent and in control of their current and future identity projects, and were able to reflect on the negative impact of their past experiences. Their efforts to present and protect their reputations and preferred identities, directly informed - what (if anything) they told myself and others about their experiences, and - their choices around language-use.

Certainly, the women in this study expressed concern about how their personal story of partner violence could negatively influence how others, including myself as interviewer, perceived and judged them – thereby undermining how they preferred to present themselves. For example, women mentioned several concerns about disclosing their experience of abuse to peers: some women feared being judged as “overly sensitive”, “neurotic”, “drama queens” or “weak”; some worried that they did not have explicit evidence to prove the legitimacy of their claims; and others anticipated being blamed for not having left their relationship at the time. Therefore, I was mindful of how these young women were possibly feeling about disclosing their experiences to me – also a professional and ‘young’ woman - and how they were trying to perform their preferred identities.



As described in the literature by Enosh and Buchbinder (2005a), women reconstructed their experiences in ways that were coherent with their perceived identities, and in a manner that had both meaning and internal logic. For example, in talking about the abuse as “small things”, women’s decisions to remain in their relationships and to placate their boyfriends were presented as - coherent with their everyday realities during the time of their relationship, and - acceptable to immediate and imaginary audiences (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b).

As discussed earlier in this chapter under the theme of ‘naming - and talking about - the abuse’, the young women in this study both opted for – and resisted – victim discourses in telling about their experiences of intimate partner violence. This was part of their conscious efforts to achieve the self-representation they were invested in at the time. Paradoxically, both their understatement of - and emphasis on - their victimisation, resulted in women being able to draw attention to their personal power, resistance, resilience and agency.

The following extract from my interview with Feroza illustrates the importance of considering the intersubjective and interactive context of interviews at all times, as well as remaining mindful of women’s investments in how their talk achieves certain self-presentation and interactional goals.

Extract 54: Feroza

- |    |        |   |
|----|--------|---|
| 1  | Adele  | Were you ever afraid of leaving – that it was dangerous to leave?         |
| 2  | Feroza | Afraid of leaving? All the time – I’m still afraid of completely cutting  |
| 3  |        | myself off (.)  |
| 4  |        | [...]   |
| 5  | Adele  | Sjoe  |
| 6  | Feroza | You don’t need to shake your head, it’s okay.                             |
| 7  | Adele  | I’m just trying to imagine how hard this has been for you.                |
| 8  | Feroza | I’m sure you’ve heard worse, I mean I don’t have any, you know,           |
| 9  |        | other - well, movies show that, you know, people get really messed        |
| 10 |        | up, physical wise, and sexually wise, so I’m sure you’ve heard worse      |
| 11 |        | (.) this is very bad, it is bad, I’m not saying it isn’t bad, but I think |
| 12 |        | there are worse stories.  |

In her interview, 20-year old Feroza had come to tell a story of severe emotional and physical abuse in her relationship with her recent ex-boyfriend; the physical abuse ranged from hand twisting, to neck choking and head banging. The particular interaction

captured in the above extract (Extract 54) took place in the context of me asking Feroza about her fear in leaving the relationship. Although her boyfriend did not explicitly threaten, or forbid her to leave, Feroza was constantly mindful of his control, and felt afraid of fully severing the relationship, and completely detaching and separating herself from him. At some point - in response to her talk, and engrossed in her story – I was nodding and shaking my head to communicate my engagement and empathy with what Feroza was busy telling me, and also gave a verbal utterance to convey this (line 1).

The above interaction suggests that Feroza possibly experienced my reaction as a judgement of how “bad” (line 11) her story was. She communicates discomfort at my expression of empathy and sympathy, possibly feeling concerned that I would think that she’s “really messed up” (lines 9-10) after her experience. It seems important to Feroza that she convey that her experience is not as terrible or upsetting when compared to others, and that she believes there are “worse” (lines 8,10,12) stories. Here she is also responding to her expectation that I have heard stories that are more severe and intense than hers (lines 8,10: “I’m sure you’ve heard worse”). Here Feroza doesn’t say that she herself has heard of worse stories, but refers to what has been portrayed in movies (lines 9-10); perhaps she needs to hear that I have indeed heard more shocking and traumatic stories in real life, and that her story is not particularly distressing to hear.

It appears that Feroza wants me to know that - despite her experience – she’s still “okay” (line 6) – I don’t need to pity her, commiserate with her, or feel concerned or overwhelmed for her; in fact, it could have been a far more terrible story. Rather than understanding this as Feroza’s attempt at minimising the severity of her experience, I hear Feroza wanting to convey a sense of control and containment – the abuse did not ‘mess her up’ completely.

Later in the interview, Feroza returned to this issue in response to my question about how it felt for her to tell me her story. Feroza admitted that she avoids telling people because they react with either pity for her (“I don’t like being looked at as in ‘ah shame’”), or judgement as to why she stayed in the relationship. Feroza again reiterated that her decision to come and tell me her story was motivated by the hope that her story could be meaningful to other young woman in her situation. Therefore, as opposed to being pitied, Feroza possibly wanted to be respected and appreciated for her courage and willingness to share her experience for the benefit of others. Hence, rather than

relate her experiences in earnest, neutral and disinterested ways, Feroza had specific investments in how her talk achieved certain self-presentation and interactional goals (Frith et al., 1998). How Feroza chose to perform her story and identity to me was strongly influenced by the context of our interaction; in telling her story she was likely responding to her anticipation and expectation of what my reaction would entail (as a woman, as a psychologist, and as a researcher).

My sense throughout the interview was that Feroza was telling her story in a very matter-of-fact, somewhat guarded and defensive manner – with fleeting expressions of anger and resistance. I think one of the functions of Feroza’s account was to protect and defend herself from inaccurate perceptions and judgements. She wanted to avoid me judging her as pitiable and damaged, and it was important to her that I not evaluate her story as an essentially sombre, gloomy and sorrowful one. Feroza therefore presented herself as a woman who could control and contain her emotions and her life despite the violence – and who was not in need of excessive sympathy or lament. However, later in her interview Feroza acknowledged that she does indeed get “emotional” - “it’s not that I sit and I cry about it in front of you, but don’t think that I’m not crying about it alone”. Here Feroza told me that she did sometimes connect with the pain and sadness of her experiences, and that she did in solitary times allow herself to feel sorrowful and vulnerable - when alone, there wasn’t the demand or danger of having to attend to the reactions and interpretations of others.

Also later in her interview, Feroza recounted a story of one of her friends, who was also controlled by a very abusive boyfriend; here Feroza could identify with the terror and helplessness her friend was feeling (“it’s so horrible to relive it through somebody else”). Therefore, despite seemingly underplaying the horror of her own story of physical abuse, Feroza could acknowledge - and empathise with - the “terrible, terrible” stories of other women who had similar experiences with IPV.

Through their telling, female participants with personal experiences of IPV impressed as confident in showing how they were able to minimise the influence and power of their ex-boyfriends in their current lives. These women presented themselves as successful in rediscovering and reclaiming their voices and identities; they had clearly put a lot of thought into thinking about - and making sense of – their previous relationships, and valued an opportunity in which to structure and tell their stories.

These participants structured their stories to highlight abusive or troublesome episodes and their subsequent transformations of self and relationship.

With regards the male participants in this study – the young men presented themselves as mindful of the role of gender, power and/or culture in their understandings and expressions of their identity and masculinity. The men positioned themselves as knowledgeable and concerned about the issue of intimate partner violence, and spoke very candidly about themselves and their experiences of intimate relationships.

Given South Africa's cultural and historical landscape - two men expressed their explicit awareness of patriarchy and gender inequality within their communities, and how these knowledges impacted on their own personal engagement in intimate relationships. The majority of the men in this study positioned themselves in opposition to common cultural and/or popular stereotypes of the domineering man, and made active efforts at representing themselves as sensitive, responsible, well-balanced, open-minded, caring and moderate men. Given my study's focus on intimate partner violence, as well as the fact that these men were interviewed by a woman, it is likely that they were countering any potentially negative assumptions, expectations and judgements on behalf of me as listener and audience to their participation.

In summary, the findings from my study underscore the fact that young men and women negotiate how they wanted to be known by the stories they develop collaboratively with listeners, and also by the stories they present to their peers, families and communities. Through their talk, the young adults in this study constructed, negotiated and performed their preferred self – selected from the multiplicity of selves that individuals switch between as they go about their lives (Riessman, 2001), and it was possible to analyse these self-representations with detailed transcriptions.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

## **5.1. Introduction**

This study was aimed at examining the issue of intimate partner violence from the perspective of young adults (18-25 years). My interest was to access young women and men's stories of intimate relationships and intimate partner violence and to tap into their usual ways of thinking and talking about these issues. My attention was directed at how participants actively imparted meaning to themselves and others, and how they negotiated, constructed and performed their identities through the situated interaction of the research interview.

The particular 'content' focus on the experiences, knowledges, understandings and perspectives of young men and women with regard to intimate partner violence, alongside the simultaneous methodological consideration of the language, structures and functions of their talk, has not been a major focal point in existing qualitative literature. Therefore, this study's analysis of 'what', 'how' and 'why' adults tell others about intimate partner violence contributes important, multi-layered perspectives and interpretations to existing understandings in the field.

In this concluding chapter, I will highlight the central findings from my study and make recommendations as to how these particular understandings, perspectives and interpretations can inform the focus of future research and/or intervention approaches and objectives. Finally, I will comment on specific limitations that inevitably confine the scope and impact of this study.

## **5.2. Intimate partner violence and self-representation – The importance of language, narrative and interaction**

The overall results underscore the notion that young adults actively attempt to make meaning of their experiences of intimate partner violence, and construct and perform their preferred identities, through the use of language and narrative. Furthermore, a common and important denominator to all of the findings from this study was the constitutive influence of the interactive and communicative context in which this occurs.

The young women and men in this study proved to be keen and knowledgeable informants who used a range of discursive and linguistic resources in telling me (and others) about their experiences and/or understandings of intimate relationships and intimate partner violence. Both female and male participants impressed me with their willingness to engage with the interactive process of the interview – they were candid, self-reflective and co-operative, and eager to explore and negotiate their (and my) understandings and meaning-making of issues. My choice in using a narrative approach in this study proved epistemologically appropriate. Given that my primary interest centred on the stories young men and women chose to come and tell, the narrative interview offered these participants a respectful and flexible space in which to talk about what was most relevant and authentic to them. The female and male participants demonstrated that they had the skills to adequately communicate with thoughtful and reflective competence about their own lives. They welcomed the dialogic opportunity offered by the research interview to talk with me about their lives and identities, and did so by actively claiming expertise and authority as the interpreters of their own experience.

The results from this study underscore the importance, purpose and power of narrative in young adults' attempts to make sense of intimate partner violence, and achieve particular self-presentation goals. The young women and men used their narratives as linguistic resources to retrospectively assess and make meaning of their past experiences of intimate partner violence; clarify their constructions of the problem of IPV and its implications for their self-construction and identity work; organise and structure their experiences; construct reality; negotiate, revise, sustain and perform their preferred identities; and manage and protect their reputations. Women in particular used the narrative interview as an opportunity to break the silence (their own and that of others), and to reclaim power and voice in telling about their first- and second-hand experiences of intimate partner violence.

Across interviews, the analysis of their narratives revealed that young women and men accomplish and index a sense of self, or identity, when they engage in talk about their experiences of intimate relationships and intimate partner violence; here – an understanding of identity as a “performative struggle over the meanings of experience” (Langellier, 2001, cited in Riessman, 2001) is an important perspective. During their interviews, participants in this study negotiated how they wanted to be known by the

stories they developed collaboratively with me as interviewer. Both men and women had specific investments in how their talk achieved certain self-presentation goals, and constructed their talk in ways that corresponded to the current formulation and meaning of their preferred selves.

Young women, in particular, performed their stories of intimate partner violence (to me and others) in ways that accomplished and indexed their preferred identities and self-presentation objectives. These young women made conscious efforts to accentuate their personal power, intelligence, independence, confidence, education and/or family stability despite their experiences of IPV. Certainly, it seemed important for the majority of the young women in this study that they be perceived as insightful, empowered and capable women – despite, and even as a result of, their experiences of intimate partner violence.

Young women are therefore very concerned about how their story of partner violence can undermine how they prefer to present themselves to others, as well as how they choose to be perceived and judged by others. Therefore, those of us who are in the business of listening must be mindful about how our careful and active listening can assist young people with experiences of intimate partner violence to be successful in constructing their desired narratives of self.

Similarly, the male participants in this study also alerted me to how they wanted to be heard and understood. These young men positioned themselves as - knowledgeable and concerned about intimate partner violence, and - in opposition to common cultural and/or popular stereotypes of the domineering man. Given my study's focus on intimate partner violence, as well as the fact that these men were interviewed by a woman, it is likely that they were countering any potentially negative assumptions, expectations and judgements on behalf of me as listener and audience to their participation. The men presented themselves as modern and moderate men who were sensitive, responsible, well-balanced, open-minded and caring. They furthermore used the interview opportunity to reflect on – and grapple with – issues of gender, power and/or culture in their understandings and expressions of their identity and masculinity. These findings suggest that young men from patriarchal cultures face many implicit and contextual challenges in striving to construct themselves as non-domineering men with personal integrity in intimate relationships. Given the context of ongoing political, social and

economic transformation in South Africa – both men and women must be supported in their efforts to construct their preferred identities, and to find new and creative ways of narrating their interpersonal relationships and identities.

In summary, through their talk, the young adults in this study constructed, revised, negotiated and performed their preferred identities - selected from the multiplicity of selves that individuals switch between as they go about their lives (Riessman, 2001). The results emphasise the importance of looking beyond the ‘content’ of young people’s talk, and illustrate that it’s possible to analyse their talk-in-interaction and self-representation with detailed transcriptions.

As underlined by the above discussion, the results from this study stress the importance and necessity of systematically analysing the narratives that we as researchers construct with our participants; in particular, the findings demonstrate the value of attending to the content, structure and function of young adults’ talk of intimate partner violence. An analysis of each of these three dimensions of their telling contributed critical understandings and interpretations of the experiences of the female and male participants in this study, and identified areas of overlap and interconnectedness. Furthermore, an attention to the details of language-use and how it contributed to meaning, as well as the communicative context and constitutive influence of the situated research interaction, were relevant and important issues to consider across all three lines of inquiry.

Certainly, the results of this study support the importance of attending to the interactive context in which young adults develop their stories of intimate partner violence, and to consider those meanings that both interviewer and interviewee bring to the “communicative event” (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005b, p.589). The analysis of the results illustrated my active role and contribution as the interviewer in the process of interaction and narrative production. Therefore, when listening to the stories young adults tell about intimate partner violence, it would be important for future practitioners and/or researchers to remain reflexive of how their own positions, assumptions and meaning-making influence those interactions and their outcomes. Given the methodological importance of considering the interactive context of the research encounter, I made conscious efforts throughout the thesis to be transparent and reflective about my positionality and representation as researcher. Moreover, I presented



my step-by-step analysis of detailed interview extracts in order to show how I achieved my interpretations, and to invite and welcome alternative readings.

In summary, the results from this study point to: the complexity and multiplicity of meaning in what - , how - and why - young adults tell of intimate partner violence; the role and influence of the interviewer in co-constructing this meaning; and young people's investments in how their talk achieves certain self-presentation and interactional goals. The interactional, performative and narrative-discursive analytical perspectives that informed my study offered additional detailed illustrations and complex interpretations of both old and new qualitative findings relating to the field of intimate partner violence.

### **5.3. Addressing the dynamics of emotional abuse**

The talk of the young women and men in this study highlighted the centrality and complexity of emotional abuse in their experiences and understandings of intimate partner violence. In particular, descriptions of emotional abuse included control and manipulation, social control through excessive jealousy, and both private and public displays of criticism, denigration, humiliation and possessiveness. Within this context, the issue of power was integral to how young adults attempted to negotiate - and make meaning of - their intimate relationships.

An important finding was that women noted the difficulty in explicitly defining and explaining their experiences of emotional abuse to others, and were concerned with the ambiguity of claiming victim status. However, the similarities in the knowledges and descriptions of emotional abuse across participants in this study – both male and female – indicate that peers are likely to grasp and accept the credibility of 'emotional abuse' claims.

Women noted the subtle, precarious and insidious nature of emotional abuse, which resulted in them only being able to recognise its full nature, impact and implications after having ended their relationships. Therefore, this study alerts to the fact that young women who are in intimate relationships characterised by emotional abuse may find it particularly difficult to identify and name the abuse timeously.

It was important to note that all of the female participants who came to tell about their personal experiences of IPV had already left their abusive relationships at the time of volunteering their participation in the research interview, and thus came to tell retrospective stories of these relationships. Young women who experienced emotional abuse in particular only redefined their partners' behaviour as abusive after having ended their relationship. Therefore, this transformation in understanding occurred only after women had left their emotionally abusive partners, and was not originally the reason why women made the decision to break up with their boyfriends. In contrast, the women who had experienced physical and sexual violence alongside emotional abuse realised they were abused whilst in the relationship – indicating that incidents of physical and/or sexual aggression are less ambiguous than the often subtle and insidious dynamic of emotional abuse. Once women had defined their past relationships as abusive, they actively expressed their resistance to their boyfriend's ongoing influence, control and power in their lives.

The finding that women redefine their relationships as abusive, and describe an increased awareness of themselves as victims only after having left their abusive partner, is a perspective recently offered by Enander and Holmberg (2008). These authors, and the findings of this study, suggest that women do not leave because they realise they are abused, but rather, that women realise they were abused after having left. This perspective is different to that in the literature which has focused on the insights women develop whilst in their abusive relationships, and leading up to their decision to leave.

The results from this study offer important recommendations for future research and/or intervention projects: firstly, it warns that projects that focus mainly on physical and/or sexual abuse in young people's intimate relationships will fail to capture a critical dimension and dynamic of partner violence; secondly, it alerts to the fact that research and/or intervention strategies need to target young adults who are currently in their intimate relationships, and who do not necessarily at the time consider/define themselves as 'victims' of intimate partner violence. Young people in general, and possibly women in particular, must be encouraged and supported to deconstruct the nature of their ongoing intimate relationships. Accordingly, research and/or intervention studies that target adults with very specific experiences of intimate partner violence will

miss out on making contact with many young people who are yet to understand and name their experiences as such.

#### **5.4. Attending to linguistic processes in the naming of intimate partner violence**

A salient result from this study is that the process of naming – and talking about - their experiences of intimate partner violence is not an easy or straightforward experience for young women and men. The female participants noted their reluctance to talk to their peers and/or families about their personal experiences of partner violence, and were acutely aware of how their decision to share these stories could negatively impact on their reputations, friendships and identities. Despite this caution and silence, this study shows that young women in particular attend very carefully and consciously to the linguistic process of naming and talking about their experiences of intimate partner violence – mostly because it has significant implications for how they succeed in their self-presentation goals. Specifically, women will both reject and emphasise their victimisation at different points in their talk in order to prove their insight, personal power, resistance and agency to their listeners and themselves.

The results from this study suggest that a relational research interview can offer people a valuable opportunity in which to engage in the process of talking about their experiences of intimate partner violence. Although the young adults will certainly still attend to self-presentation goals and concerns, their talk in such a context possibly holds fewer - and less direct - implications for their social lives and reputations, thereby encouraging them to more openly articulate their meaning-making of their relationships. Moreover, the relational interview can assist women in their efforts to reclaim their clarity of voice, articulate and explore their reality, and make sense of the breach between their understandings and those imposed on them by their abusive partners. In addition, my analysis points to the need for researchers/interviewers – who talk to young adults about IPV - to maintain a positional reflexivity throughout their interactions. This will be critical in order for them to better understand and monitor their constitutive role and influence in how young women and men talk about themselves and their experiences of intimate partner violence.

#### **5.5. Allowing for complexity and ambiguity in narratives of IPV**

Several findings from this study illustrate the complex and intricate ways in which young adults make sense of intimate partner violence in general, and their personal experiences in particular. The majority of participants, including all of those who had first-hand experiences of partner violence, focused on the particular feelings, choices and individual qualities and identities of the people in the abusive relationship. Therefore, despite the external cultural and structural constraints faced by South African women in particular, it would seem that young adults prefer to make sense of intimate partner violence from an individualistic perspective.

The fact that none of the participants who made sense of IPV within the context of South Africa's history of patriarchy and gender inequality had first-hand experiences of IPV, offers a new additional perspective. It suggests that a young person's level of personal experience with intimate partner violence will to some extent determine the level of abstraction he/she uses in explaining and making meaning of it. Young adults with no experience of partner violence do not need to focus on identity issues, and are therefore more able and/or likely to take distal factors into account when constructing abstract explanations for the problem. In contrast, it can be expected that young people with personal experience of partner violence will more readily focus on immediate identity issues and other proximal factors in making sense of the problem. This finding suggests that a first-hand experience of IPV cannot be separated from the highly personal, intimate and introspective process of self-construction. This argument ties in well with another finding from this study – consistent with existing literature (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007) - that showed that male and female participants with first- or second-hand experience with IPV found it more difficult to make sense of the problem of IPV than those without such experience.

Linked to the primary focus on how young adults make sense of intimate partner violence, the majority of the female participants in this study who had ended their abusive relationships articulated their resistance to – and disillusionment with – romantic narratives that expect women to care for, and please, their partners under any and all circumstances. Of significance, both women and men critically reflected on the problematic implications of women remaining in destructive relationships, staying silent about their boyfriend's abuse, or attempting to change their partners; the participants acknowledged the importance of maintaining a sense of identity and connectedness as a separate individual from one's intimate partner.

These findings suggest that young adults in South Africa – and to some extent their cultural communities – are starting to question and challenge traditional constructions of romantic love. Certainly, both female and male participants in this study emphasised their awareness of power differentials, and their conscious desire and efforts to negotiate equality in future relationships. It is here that a range of adult role models to young adults (e.g. community, political and/or social activists, academic lecturers, clinical practitioners, researchers, etc.), can encourage and support these women and men in their efforts to develop new cultural and relational scripts that enable them to successfully achieve equality in future intimate relationships.

Another way in which women, in particular, made sense of their personal experiences of intimate partner violence was to construct dual understandings of their abusive boyfriends; this has been described in existing literature (Wood, 2001b; Towns & Adams, 2000; Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999). A new finding was that women who told stories of their father's abuse towards their mother also constructed dual understandings of their abusive fathers. Their success in maintaining this duality had direct implications for their ongoing relationships with their fathers, as well as their meaning-making of their past abusive relationships with their boyfriends. Here, the narrative analytical approach of my study was invaluable in capturing the ways in which women used language to construct these dual understandings, and how they struggled with the entanglements of their binary constructions. The results show that women need a discursive space in which to offer their equivocal linguistic constructions of their abusive boyfriends/fathers; therefore, the aim of interviewers should not necessarily be to gain clarity or certainty, but rather to allow women to grapple with – and narrate - the puzzle, conflict and contradiction inherent in their experiences.

Linked to the above theme of dual understandings, as well as their overall attempts at making sense of IPV, the female participants in this study identified the issue of intentionality as a central concern. Despite their understanding that emotional and/or physical abuse were their partner's/father's attempts at gaining dominance and control in the relationship, women in this study with first- and second-hand experiences of IPV consciously grappled with the issue of intent; they questioned to what extent the abuse from their ex-boyfriends or fathers was wilful and deliberate, and held purpose and design. The answer to this question informed the meaning and significance they

attached to their stories of IPV, and held major implications for their ongoing relationships with these men. The finding that young women are more likely to consider behaviour as abusive if there is evidence of negative intent – as opposed to negative impact only - alerts practitioners to the importance of attending to the issue of intentionality in how young people understand -, evaluate - and respond to - the violence within the context of their intimate relationships.

The above discussion on how participants in this study attempted to make sense of intimate partner violence highlights two significant issues. Firstly, it shows that young people make meaning of their knowledges and/or experiences of intimate partner violence through dynamic and intricate linguistic and discursive processes. Secondly, it supports the value and importance of methodological research approaches that allow for complexity, ambiguity and multiplicity in how young people make meaning of the problem IPV – and the suggested consequences of their interpretations. Researchers and/or practitioners in the field of IPV must make room for these rich and ‘messy’ stories, as well as draw from all levels of experiences; these multiple and complex frames of understanding can better inform flexible, comprehensive and creative intervention strategies.

### **5.6. Young adults and their intimate relationships – An essential focus**

Several findings from this study point to a critical and essential understanding, i.e. that intimate relationships are important and relevant to young adults and their current identity projects. This may at the outset seem like quite an obvious statement, however, it is important to explore its full meaning and implication for young men and women. The results from this study show that young adults pursue intimate relationships in a determined and conscious manner, and their earnest commitment to these relationships are central to their attempts to present themselves as mature, responsible, purposeful and successful adults. However, in doing so, young men and women are vulnerable to becoming isolated in – and consumed by - very intense intimate relationships, to the exclusion of social engagement with peers and family. Certainly, one of the reasons for this focus on initiating and maintaining intimate relationships is the influence of the dominant narrative of courtship and coupledness (Reynolds et al., 2007) – with both women and men having certain expectations of the appropriate trajectory for their lives.

In addition to the importance and intensity of intimate relationships for young adults, the results furthermore underline the importance of considering the time and place of these relationships in the lives of young adults, and the implications of this timing for their identity work. The men and women in this study engaged in formal and long-lasting relationships at a crucial stage of personal and social development. Therefore, young adults are in danger of becoming involved and isolated in intense and abusive relationships at a time of transition, growth and change. Certainly, finishing high-school, making the transition to university, and adapting successfully to the demands of their new academic and social lives are stressful life-circumstance events for most young adults, and becoming involved in an abusive relationship at this juncture can have destabilising consequences. In addition - and in comparison to their older counterparts - young women have had fewer opportunities to build self-understanding and consolidate their identity projects; therefore, a violent relationship at this stage of their lives can have critical implications for how young women experience and construct their sense of self.

The findings from this study contribute a fundamental perspective – that young adults do the majority of their identity work in the context of intimate relationships; therefore, the nature of these relationships is crucial. Moreover, when faced with the intimate trauma of partner violence at this critical time in their lives – young women struggle to separate themselves from it.

Moreover, these past relationships have important implications for young women's experiences post-separation from their abusive boyfriends – an area which has received less attention in the literature. After ending their abusive relationships, the female participants in this study described having to come to full terms with the ramifications of these relationships, and they had to adjust their identity-construction and life-structuring accordingly. For the most part, these women spoke about wanting to feel empowered, capable and in control of their future identity projects, and accordingly became fiercely protective of their self-interests. However, given their knowledge of the dangers, distortions and perversions of abusive love relationships – some women struggled to engage in new peer relationships, and commented on their feelings of ongoing social isolation in this regard. It would therefore be helpful if future intervention programmes can identify these women, and assist them to gradually and safely explore and establish healthy and supportive relational connections.

Similarly to their female counterparts, the narratives of the men in this study indicate that an experience of intimate partner violence also holds important implications for how men manage their identity claims. Existing literature has suggested that experiences of partner violence can hold implications for a man's masculinity; therefore, men's silence about intimate partner violence could represent their attempts to prevent their masculinity from being challenged or criticised (Migliaccio, 2001). Results from my study contribute additional perspectives to current understandings of men's experiences of partner violence. Firstly, the results indicate that maintaining successful intimate relationships is as important for men's identity projects, as it is for those of women. Secondly, the findings suggest that an experience of partner violence can injure a man's sense of personal power in intimate relationships, and be interpreted by men as an overall lack of competence. Feelings of being less competent and less capable than their female partners can be particularly shameful for men whose family and culture value the role, influence and contribution of strong male figures.

### **5.7. Inviting young people to speak their knowledges and/or experiences of IPV**

A central theme that cut across the narratives of the young women and men in this study was their general and/or past reluctance to speak of their knowledges and/or experiences of intimate partner violence – albeit for different reasons and in different interactive contexts. The stories of several young women pointed to a new and important perspective, i.e. that the silencing power of intimate partner violence can significantly harm and rupture sibling relationships and familial bonds. Young women who had a father who was abusive toward their mother spoke about the impact of dealing with the 'silence' and 'secrecy' surrounding their family story of intimate partner violence. Maintaining this shameful secret often resulted in disconnection between siblings who felt unable to name their experiences, and to openly tell and listen to each other's stories. Therefore, without being allowed to speak the unspeakable, siblings can't know how to support and validate each other's experiences of facing IPV in the home.

Young women who feel pressured to conspire with their family's silent secret of intimate partner violence will have their voices silenced, and their knowledges and experiences dismissed. It is here that a relational and discursive research interview can offer women the opportunity to speak out against this silencing, and to tell what it is



they know. Also, the findings from this study illustrate the value and importance of giving young women the opportunity to tell about both their first- and second-hand experiences of intimate partner violence in descriptive, detailed, intimate and meaningful ways.

This reluctance to tell what it is they know was also evident in another significant finding - not previously identified in the literature - relating to how young men and women feel about giving their friends feedback about their potentially abusive intimate relationships. Despite their interests in – and efforts to – closely observe and attend to the intimate relationships of their peers, men and women expressed concern that their intentions would be misjudged as inappropriate, misguided or selfish. Therefore, despite their keen observations and astute perceptions, it appears that both men and women are dissuaded from being transparent about their opinions, and/or honestly confronting and challenging each other about the nature of their intimate relationships. This in turn results in young adults minimising and undermining the impact and influence they can have in each other's lives.

The above results argue that explicit efforts should be made to show young adults that their knowledges and/or experiences of intimate partner violence are valid and important, and that they can be invaluable sources of help, support and insight to one another. By explicitly inviting young men and women to talk and learn about intimate partner violence, they can be encouraged to feel less resistant about positioning themselves in relation to this issue; in addition, they can be supported in disclosing their experiences and/or perspectives in ways that can be helpful and meaningful to themselves and others. Aside from being offered the opportunities to speak out against self-silencing, and to fully tell their own stories, young adults need to be shown the merits of peer intervention, and be taught the skills to intervene in each other's lives in helpful, safe and effective ways.

Linked to their disinclination to tell about their experiences of IPV, an alarming finding from this study was that – whilst in their troubling relationships – young women did not anticipate that disclosure to informal and/or formal networks would have been helpful. Both - women who at the time did not define their relationships as 'emotionally abusive', and women who were able to name their experiences of sexual and/or physical abuse, were unwilling and unlikely to fully disclose their experiences to friends and

family. Therefore, it seems that young people are unlikely to use these networks in their efforts to understand and/or leave their abusive relationships. Furthermore, given the importance of protecting their reputations, identities and friendships – young adults are firmly invested in having the power to define themselves and their intimate relationships. Friends are not always successful in supporting the young person's interpretations of his/her relationship experiences, thereby contributing to men and women choosing to remain silent.

As pointed out earlier - by not disclosing their experiences to one another, young adults are not building knowledge, comfort, skill or experience in how to intervene in each other's lives regarding the issue of intimate partner violence. Furthermore, the results from this study suggest that certain cultural communities are pertinently influential in dissuading, and even prohibiting, young adults from engaging in honest and open dialogue about their intimate partnerships. This results in young adults not having access to the knowledge, feedback and support of trusted elders in their community, which in turn strengthens the barrier of silence with regards to the disclosure of intimate partner violence.

The fact that they were unwilling to seek either formal or informal help whilst struggling with their relationship, was similarly striking and disconcerting to the female participants themselves. Nevertheless, the women made the link between naming an experience as abusive, and the need to tell someone about it, and were mindful of how the absence of someone to speak to reinforced their silence and avoidance. Of significance, after having redefined their past experiences as abusive, the women in this study consciously sought out and valued the discursive space offered by the research encounter. These women welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences, and articulate their current and past understandings of their intimate relationships. Therefore, the results point to the fact that when women start to consider the possibility of partner violence in their lives, they do value and seek out discursive spaces in which to make meaning of their experiences. Consequently, university and other institutions should introduce and facilitate safe discursive spaces – both formal and informal - in which young men and women can initiate and sustain this kind of interactive dialogue and feedback. If young people (with and without first-hand experiences of partner violence) can feel more confident about - and supported in - their knowledges and/or

experiences of IPV, they will possibly be more willing to share these with their friends and/or family.

With regards formal resources, it is necessary to remember that young adults are not in a position to easily access or afford formal/professional help outside of the institutional settings in which they currently find themselves; therefore, it would be important to make young adults aware of the available and accessible formal help-services at their relevant institutions. Young women and men should be made to feel comfortable and safe in approaching these services, and must be ensured that issues of confidentiality and anonymity will be respected and maintained at all times. In addition, student counselling centres in teaching and/or training settings should correct the misconception that they only cater for students who are experiencing difficulties in relation to their academic lives; hence, they should raise awareness of intimate partner violence and explicitly encourage young people to talk about their intimate and relational lives. This will signal to students that their disclosures will be met with empathic and appropriate responses.

### **5.8. Considering the structure and language of IPV narratives**

Aside from the insights gained regarding ‘what’ young adults make their talk about, the results from this study point to how young women use structure and language in their efforts to organise and construct their stories of intimate partner violence, and thus to promote understanding and interpretation of their experiences. This methodological focus on ‘how’ young adults, in particular, talk about their experiences of intimate partner violence was not identified in my literature review, and therefore offers a new and important perspective in this regard.

In telling about their past abusive relationships, the young women in this study intermittently used a temporal/spatial framework to indicate time, place, duration and progression of partner violence. These references to time and space enabled women to place their experiences in context, and to achieve a sense of narrative continuity. However, the use of temporal references did not necessarily result in linear narratives (with a beginning, middle and end); rather, narratives were mostly circular in nature, and were stitched together by episodes that illustrated salient and powerful themes related to intimate partner violence. These temporal and episodic organising

frameworks were predominantly very effective in illustrating the dramatic and timeous unfolding and progression of a series of episodes and thematic topics related to intimate partner violence. Therefore, the results show that both temporal and thematic issues are central to how young women retrospectively remember and reconstruct their experiences and understandings of IPV. Despite the circular and iterative cycle of thematic episodes, young women can retrospectively identify the underlying temporal thread – thereby pulling their accounts of abusive episodes together into a meaningful and continuous narrative.

By taking note of the ways in which they structure and tell their stories of intimate partner violence, researchers and/or practitioners can better understand how young women develop awareness of – and insight into – the scope of the problem. Furthermore, by organising their narratives in particular ways, young women alert their listeners to the most salient features of their experience; this in turn offers us useful templates for understanding the nature, expression, timing and process of intimate partner violence in the lives of young women.

In addition, the methodological insights gained from focusing on the structure of their talk, inform researchers and/or practitioners how best to speak to - and ask women about – their experiences of intimate partner violence, and how best to listen to – and understand – their stories. These insights can in turn signal which points of entry into young women's narratives of IPV will be the most meaningful and helpful areas for future exploration and intervention.

Generally, the ways in which the young women in this study chose to reconstruct and narrate their experiences of partner violence illustrated their willingness to remain engaged with – and connected to - their memories and experiences. This illustrates that women make meaningful efforts at processing and integrating their experiences of intimate partner violence, and that they are likely to welcome opportunities in which sensitive listeners help them to do so.

Finally, the findings discussed here support the suggestions made by Hydén (2007) in her narrative research with abused women, i.e. that researchers and/or practitioners should aim to offer young women a discursive space that invites and respects their use of different temporal frameworks, and should guard against disciplining the telling of

women into traditional linear lines. Rather, this study has shown the importance of allowing young women the opportunity to structure, develop and tell their narratives of intimate partner violence as they see fit. This in turn will indicate how others must hear their stories, and what kind of responses young women will experience as relevant and meaningful.

With regards the use of language, the particular word choice of “small things” was a common discursive and linguistic resource used by all the women who told about their personal experiences of intimate partner violence. The young women in this study emphasised that their boyfriend’s increased power and control in the relationship happened gradually - through the accumulative impact and insidious dynamic of seemingly insignificant “small things”. Women explained that they consciously altered or adapted their behaviour in attempts to manage and protect the relationship, avert future conflict, and focus on the important aspects of the relationship. In light of this purpose - the sacrifices, concessions and compromises made by women seemed of minor consequence and importance at the time.

The female participants’ talk of “small things” was a very powerful discursive and linguistic resource. It contributes a new and important perspective to the literature on young adults and intimate partner violence, and elucidates how young women remember, understand, interpret and present their experiences and meaning-making of intimate partner violence. Hence, the language and meaning-making of “small things” offer practitioners an additional and meaningful framework with which to assist young women to deconstruct and track the nature, dynamic, impact and consequence of troubling issues in their intimate relationships. Specifically, the results suggest that it can be useful for women to think and talk about “small things” within the context of specific interactions/episodes in their relationship – which in turn could draw attention to a particular theme characteristic of intimate partner violence (e.g. excessive jealousy and possessiveness). In addition, it would then seem helpful that women place these “small things” into a spatial context (time, place, duration etc.), where its occurrence and development can be tracked over a period of time. In summary, given their ways of interpreting, telling and structuring their narratives, the female participants in this study have provided practitioners with significant and insightful information on how to talk to women about their potentially abusive relationships – past and present.

### **5.9. Clarifying goals and intentions for telling about experience**

The men and women responded to this research study with purposeful motive and intention; hence, the unstructured narrative interview style I adopted was vital in enabling these participants to express and pursue their initial goals and interests. The rationale for – and application of - this particular methodological stance in research on young adults and intimate partner violence, in particular, was not identified in my literature review, and the findings from this study certainly support its value and relevance.

Two major reasons for participation were identified across the range of motivations expressed by the men and women in this study. Firstly, young adults expressed their desire and willingness to voice their knowledges and experiences of intimate relationships and intimate partner violence – to myself and other potential audiences. Secondly, the male and female participants were trying to make meaning of – and integrate – these experiences and knowledges into their own relational identities, and consciously sought out the discursive interview space in which to do so. These results strongly indicate that young adults actively seek out opportunities to break the silence and isolation surrounding their experiences of intimate partner violence, and that they come to these discursive encounters with a specific agenda in mind. Future researchers and practitioners working with young adults must take the time to clarify what the young women and men’s objectives and intentions are in wanting to tell their stories of intimate partner violence and intimate relationships. This knowledge and insight can only improve the quality and outcome of research and/or clinical encounters with young people.

### **5.10. Limitations**

Compared to approaches where identity is primarily conceived as developing through self-reflection and not discourse (Thorne, 2004), there are some shortcomings to my situated narrative analysis approach that need to be acknowledged. The assumption that the participants and I could – despite being total strangers - make sense of each other in once-off interviews possibly reduces these women and men in terms of their histories of personal experiences. Furthermore, my attempt to focus my analysis on only what was made relevant or ‘demonstrably attended to’ by the participants in our interaction may strip these individuals of their history (Bamberg, 2004).

With the above criticisms in mind, my study's approach acknowledges the rehearsed nature of talk which is part of the extended process through which identities are constructed and taken up. "Although identity work is situated and a new version of an 'up to now' life narrative is presented on a particular occasion as part of a particular interaction, it is a new *version* and not a wholly new creation" (Taylor, 2005, p.48). A speaker's investment in certain subject positions can thus be understood as a consequence of some identity work becoming established through repetition and rehearsal. Although identity work continues throughout a lifetime, this concept of self-narration as rehearsal seems particularly important for younger people, who are still very busy constructing identities, and have almost certainly had less opportunity to establish stories of self through repeated tellings (Taylor, 2005). From this perspective, the research interviews in my study offered young women and men "a congenial performance context for such rehearsal" (p. 49), and was an attractive medium for identity work (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Nevertheless, more personal and biographical background information about participants, as well as second- and third-interviews with the same men and women, would possibly have captured some of the continuity and context of their identity work.

This study is also limited in the lack of – or minimal – representation of certain experiences of intimate partner violence, including men's experiences of being abused by their female partners, women's experiences of their use of violence towards their male partners, and women's experiences of sexual and/or physical abuse. The results from this study certainly point to the definitional power of simplistic, gender-specific constructions of intimate partner violence, which make it difficult for 'violent women' and 'abused men' to know how to position themselves in relation to popular understandings of IPV. Therefore, future research projects must consider ways of accessing these narratives that will, in turn, assist young men and women to transcend simplistic gender-constructions of IPV.

Furthermore, this study is limited to the representation of experiences of young adults who are students at an urban tertiary academic university. Although the participants came from diverse cultural and class backgrounds, and many of them told retrospective stories that included their first romantic relationships back home, these young men and women were positioned by the middle-class and educational context in which they

currently lived and studied. Therefore, the experiences of young men and women living and working in impoverished, rural or crime-ridden areas need to be explored in future studies.

Finally, for logistical and ethical reasons, it was not possible to present the readers of this thesis with the transcription and analysis of complete interviews. However, this would have preserved the narratives as essential meaning-making structures, and allowed for a more detailed representation and analysis of how particular respondents constructed their narratives over the course of their interviews. Although my analysis does attend to the language, structures and functions of participants' talk, the fragmentation of the texts does not capture the sequential patterns of these stories.

### **5.11. Conclusions**

Although it was not an objective at the outset of this research study, certainly, the insights, understandings and perspectives offered by the results should be used to inform appropriate and meaningful future intervention programmes at UCT and other institutions that cater for young adults. Importantly, this study supports the argument that - in order to be experienced as helpful - meanings of intimate partner violence need to be negotiated to include the young adults' own interpretations of their experiences, as well as their particular ascriptions of meaning (Lempert, 1997b). When these meanings are available to formal and informal helpers - awareness, understanding and tolerance can be expanded.

One of the values of this and other narrative analysis studies is that a better comprehension of meaning-making can offer suggestions of how people may act on their social constructions or their experiences of a particular position. The aim is to attend to suggested consequences of the interpretive reality (Josselson, 2006). In addition, narrative research encourages the development of a knowledge base that privileges dialogue amongst researchers and practitioners. Therefore, it would be beneficial and exciting to bring researchers and practitioners across disciplines together to engage with the results of this study, and to explore and articulate the ways in which these findings can improve and inform future research projects and clinical practice.



On a final note, the young women and men in this study came to talk about their knowledges, meaning-making and experiences of intimate relationships and intimate partner violence, and they did so in ways that made an important and memorable impact on me as a - qualitative researcher, - psychologist, - woman, - South African, and someone who values the importance and power of narrative. In particular, I was struck by how the young women and men consciously and thoughtfully engaged with me as interviewer, and how intent they were on making themselves known in relation to their experiences of intimate partner violence. Importantly, my conversations with the young people in this study have made me far more mindful and reflexive of - how I listen to others, and - what frames my seeing of their stories of intimate partner violence. Furthermore, my interaction with the participants, and my analysis of their narratives, have clarified and solidified a central issue for me, i.e. that in order to best serve the interests of young adults, it is necessary that we as listeners interactively manage and discursively negotiate their stories of intimate partner violence. If the self-presentation goals and concerns of young people are not consciously and respectfully attended to, it is likely that well-intentioned research projects and/or help provision will be encountered as disadvantageous and perhaps even harmful – ultimately resulting in young adults choosing not to tell their stories of intimate partner violence to others. Therefore, young women and men must be supported in their efforts to voice - and make-meaning of - their experiences of intimate partner violence; in addition, they must be supported to do so in ways that allow them to explore, revise, sustain and perform their preferred narratives of self. I know that if I had to again meet with the young women and men who participated in this study, I will better listen to – and hear – their stories this time around.

- 1 Speakers were given pseudonyms and identifying details have been removed from interview extracts.
- 2 The transcription notation in these interview extracts is a very simplified version of that developed by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984, for a fuller account, referenced in Reynolds, Wetherell, and Taylor, 2007)

[. . .]	Material deliberately omitted
(laughs)	Hearable laughter from the speaker
(crying)	Hearable crying from the speaker
(.)	Short untimed pause
<u>text</u>	Speaker emphasis

Punctuation is given for ease of reading, and does not indicate speech patterns.

- 3 In order to make more primary data available (in addition to that already included in the data analysis chapter), I have attached a disc that includes the transcriptions of nine interviews to the inside back cover of the thesis. For confidentiality reasons, this material (including the full interview transcript in Appendix B) will not be included in the final library copy of this thesis.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF ARTICLES IN SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

	Author, date and type of publication	Object under investigation	Data collection methods and Sample details  Age range	Main results	Methodological/ Analytical approach  Theoretical/ conceptual framework
1.	Mahlstedt, D. & Keeny, L. <b>1993</b>  Article	How young adult female survivors of dating violence involved members of their social network in the experience of abuse.	Questionnaire data from 130 female university students  18-31 years (mean age 21 years)	6 categories of causal explanation of dating violence emerged from the content analysis: <i>power, gender socialisation, relationship, communication, alcohol and individual.</i>	Statistical / content analysis
2.	Lempert, L.B. <b>1994</b>  Article	How one woman tells the story of her lived experiences of violence and her transformation of self within a violent intimate relationship.	In-depth interview with 1 woman (Jane) from a drop-in centre support group for women who had experienced IPV	The narrative analysis of Jane's story of her abusive marital relationship situated her as a social psychological actor and active agent who apprehended, sustained, and transformed the concepts of violence and of self while interacting with her physical, psychological, social and cultural environment. The central story was Jane's transformation of self, and tracked her struggle to both accept and reject her abuser's definitions of the situation and her self.	Narrative analysis of the structure and sequence of talk
3.	Bartle, S.E. & Rosen, K. <b>1994</b>  Article	Presents a relational view of violence.	Illustrative case study	The paper offers a thesis, from a systemic perspective: it suggests that violence in intimate couple relationships is, in part, a <i>distance-regulating mechanism</i> that maintains a balance between separateness and connectedness in the relationship. The individual developmental process that allows a balance to be maintained without violence is individuation.	Thesis - systemic perspective
4.	Lempert, L.B. <b>1995</b>  Book chapter	Definitional Dialogues in Abusive Relationships.	In-depth interviews with 32 self-selected women participating in an outreach support group  21-57 years	Results suggest that women's changing and evolving definitions of the situation are the necessary conditions for their simultaneous and subsequent transformations of self. Their constructive processes originate in definitional dialogues with self, with partners, and with outsiders.	Grounded theory

5.	Hall Smith, P., Tessaro, I. & Earp, J.L. <b>1995</b>  Article	Women's Experiences with Battering: A Conceptualisation from Qualitative Research.	5 focus groups with 22 female participants from 5 programs for battered women in North Carolina  20-49 years	6 domains emerged: <i>perceived threat, altered identity, managing, entrapment, yearning and disempowerment</i> .  Battering is conceptualised as an enduring, traumatic, and multidimensional experience that is manifested in women's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.	Thematic content analysis
6.	Langford, D.R. <b>1996</b>  Article	A theoretical model of how women predict men's violence within the context of battering.	Semi-structured small-group interviews with 30 women from a community sample  21-65 years (mean age 35 years)	Battered women developed sophisticated knowledge about and response patterns to their partners' violent behaviours. The theory of " <i>predicting unpredictability</i> " emphasises the simultaneous, circular and ongoing nature of monitoring and responding to the perceptions of danger women experience in their interactions with abusive partners.	Grounded theory
7.	Rosen, K.H. & Bird, K. <b>1996</b>  Article	The complex individual and relationship processes that occurred in an intimate relationship where love and violence coexisted.	A longitudinal, in-depth qualitative case study of one couple in a premarital relationship in which the man (32 years old) had been repeatedly violent toward his female partner (29 years old)	Although contextual processes (e.g. patriarchal societal structures) shape violence against women, the violence is inflicted and experienced in the lives of individuals. This study, which takes a microscopic look at how love and violence coexisted in an intimate relationship, shows how the political becomes personal.	Grounded theory  Feminist framework
8.	Rosen, K.H. <b>1996</b>  Book chapter	The ties that bind women to violent premarital relationships	Individual semi-structured interviews with 22 women in dating relationships  General public and university students (mean age 21 years); 16 to 32 years old when they began their violent dating relationships	This study confirms the notion that becoming a battered woman is a process just as leaving a violent relationship is a process. <i>Seduction and entrapment processes</i> emerged as forces that tended to draw women into their relationships and to keep them there.	Thematic content analysis  Feminist framework
9.	Farrell, M.L. <b>1996</b>  Article	The lived experience of healing in women who encountered abuse.	Semi-structured interviews with 7 women who had completed a year-long community program that provided services to homeless women  25-37 years	Four major themes of healing were identified: 1) <i>flexibility</i> , (acknowledgement of past experiences, resiliency, establishing appropriate boundaries); 2) <i>awakening</i> (dealing with feelings, inner strength, hope, spirituality, inner peace); 3) <i>relationship</i> (harmony, connection, trust); and 4) <i>empowerment</i> (self-determination and sense of accomplishment).	Content analysis  Phenomenology

10.	Lempert, L.B. <b>1997</b>  Article	The informal help-seeking overtures of women in abusive relationships, and the unintended consequences of these overtures.	In-depth interviews with 32 women self-selected from outreach support groups	Gender appeared most salient in the women's narratives, and transcended issues of race and/or ethnicity. Respondents first sought assistance from informal helpers by telling the stories of their violent experiences. Well-intentioned help provision frequently had unintended negative consequences: it was not necessarily the help women wanted and the assistance was often based on a definitional contingency, or acceptance of others' definitions of the situations and others' prescriptions for action.	Grounded theory  Some attention paid to narrative structure
11.	Matar Curnow, S.A. <b>1997</b>  Article	To determine when helpseeking and reality behaviours are most likely to be exhibited by battered women.	Interviews with 22 women from an urban shelter for battered women	Four propositions are found in the <i>Open Window Phase</i> of help-seeking and reality: 1) A battered woman realises she is a victim and is not able to stop the violence; 2) A battered woman is most likely to reach out for help; 3) A battered woman will learn whether or not there are alternatives to violence; and 4) A battered woman is most receptive to intervention.	Grounded theory
12.	Langford, D.R. <b>1998</b>  Article	Social Chaos and Danger as Context of Battered Women's Lives.	Semi-structured small-group interviews with 30 women from a community sample  Mid-30s in age	Social chaos emerged as the context of battering. Social chaos is created by a combination of factors: abusive men's unpredictability and use of unbalancing behaviours, contradictions, women's impaired sense of self, and the secrecy of battering. Chaos creates a sense of danger in women and serves to control their behaviour.	Grounded theory
13.	Stevens, P.E., Richards, D.J. <b>1998</b>  Article	A narrative case analysis of HIV infection in a battered woman	Single case study of one woman taken from a larger feminist study of 20 women's experiences living with HIV/AIDS in the US	The case analysis illustrates the coupling of domestic violence and HIV transmission, and raises the question of how particular circumstances of violent relationships create HIV risk for women?	Instrumental case study
14.	Wood, K., Maforah, F. & Jewkes, R. <b>1998</b>  Article	Sexual dynamics occurring within adolescent relationships.	Semi-structured interviews with 24 pregnant, Xhosa-speaking adolescent women living in Khayelitsha (an African township in peri-urban Cape Town in the Western Cape, South Africa) 14-18 years (average 16.4 years)	Male violent and coercive practices dominated the sexual relationships of the adolescent participants. Violence was not limited to the first sexual act or to the first relationship, but was described as coercion occurring within regular, on-going partnerships. Conditions and timings of sex were defined by male partners through the use of violence and through the circulation of certain constructions of love, intercourse and entitlement to which the teenage girls were expected to submit.	Content analysis

15.	Wood, K. & Jewkes, R. <b>1998</b>  Article	Micro-dynamics of violence in sexual relationships of young people in Umtata.	In-depth semi-structured interviews with youth (22 girls, 8 boys) from two schools in Ngangelizwe township, Umtata, Eastern Cape, South Africa  16-26 years	Violence was used by boys as a way of imposing the 'rules' of the relationship, and was associated with girls' rejections of 'proposals of love', their attempts to end relationships, their refusals of sex, their attempts to check up on their boyfriend's fidelity, their attempts to undermine their boyfriend's success with other women and their actual or suspected infidelity.  Gaining and keeping girlfriends/boyfriends were overwhelming preoccupations of the youth. Their male and female identities were substantially constructed in terms of success in sexual relationships and this was deployed in struggles for position and status within peer groups.	Content analysis  Ethnographic approach
16.	Eisikovits, Z., Buchbinder, E. & Mor, M. <b>1998</b>  Article	The inner process leading up to the turning point in women who were abused and stayed with their partners but took active steps to stop the violence.	In-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 women from a domestic violence agency in a large municipal area in northern Israel	The turning point was an outcome of the collapse of a system of meaning that had kept the women in the violent relationships. The change in meaning was total and came after a series of losses.  The battered women described two types of losses that were interrelated and fed off each other: a) <i>Interpersonal- and other- related</i> (loss of love, loss of positive traits in the other, and loss of faith in the possibility of change) and b) <i>related to the self</i> (the loss of the authentic self, loss of security, and the loss of meaning in coping).	Thematic content analysis  Phenomenological feminist approach
17.	Sleutel, M.E. <b>1998</b>  Review	Women's Experiences of Abuse: A Review of Qualitative Research.	Qualitative research published within 15 years (1983 to 1997)	The following themes were identified across studies: effect of abuse on women's self-esteem; prison-like existence; how women rationalise the abuse; factors influencing the decision to leave the batterer; the process of leaving; women's perceptions of the police and legal system; women's experiences with the health-care profession; community support; women's perceptions of religious institutions and leaders; the role of substance abuse in violent relationships; elderly women; black women; other cultures; women who fight back; pregnancy and partner abuse; family of origin.	Descriptive summary of themes/ categories across studies

18.	Dangor, Z.; Hoff, L.A.; Scott, R. <b>1998</b>  Article	Women's experiences with violence and abuse. Women's perception of the relationship between abuse, apartheid and the traditional status of women.	Interviews and 2 focus groups with 37 South African women from various community settings and institutions  Mean age 30 years	Patriarchy, women's rights and position in the society, economic deprivation, apartheid and unemployment were cited as major reasons for abuse of women in society. The most frequent reasons given for violence against women by men were: alcohol and drug abuse; socialisation of women into subservient roles; jealousy; men feeling threatened; and men treating women as property.	Content analysis
19.	Rothery, M., Tutty, L. & Weaver, G. <b>1999</b>  Article	Women's experiences with the decision to remove themselves from violent relationships.	Semi-structured interviews with 35 women from shelter services  Average age 32 years	The data supports an ecological understanding of the tough choices women in abusive relationships face. An ecological framework respects the role of environmental factors (demands and resources) in helping or constraining choices at the same time as it recognises the importance of powerful mediating factors (beliefs, values, and a sense of personal efficacy).	Thematic content analysis  Ecological theory
20.	Eisikovits, Z. & Buchbinder, E. <b>1999</b>  Article	The language that women use in coping with battering.	Separate interviews with 25 married and cohabiting couples in a large urban area in northern Israel  Couples reported at least one incident of violence to social service and police departments during the year prior to data collection	The theme of ' <i>control</i> ' is central to women's descriptions of violent events and their development. These metaphors of control increase the women's ability to survive experiences that otherwise would be unbearable and, as such, create a sense of power in coping.  Findings are ordered into two major categories: one is related to metaphors reflecting women's perceptions of their partner's attempts to control themselves and the women. The other is related to metaphors describing women's attempts to control the violent situation by controlling themselves.	Thematic content analysis  Phenomenological-constructivist tradition; Feminist theory
21.	Belknap, R.A. <b>1999</b>  Article	Decisions experienced as moral conflicts by women who have experienced abuse by an intimate partner.	Semi-structured interviews with 18 American rural women in a Midwestern state  25-51 years	All of the moral conflict issues explicated from the narratives were relational issues. Three categories of decisions of moral conflict emerged from the women's responses: the decision to leave the abusive relationship, decisions that threatened sense of self, and decisions of resistance.	Narrative analysis  Theoretical framework of moral development.
22.	Hydén, M. <b>1999</b>  Article	The psychological process of breaking up from an abusive husband; the ways in which women account for the decision to leave.	Interviews with 10 women (over a two year period) who sought refuge at a shelter for battered women in Stockholm, Sweden, after leaving their abusive husband	The theme of fear constituted a major and unavoidable part of the break-up process. Fear was identified as a complex emotion that changed character with time.  The author identified two basic kinds of fear: undifferentiated and differentiated. In the weeks and months after the break-up,	Narrative content analysis  Foucault's conceptualisation of power

			25-41 years	<p><i>undifferentiated fear</i> completely overwhelmed the women as a general feeling, and they saw no opportunity to influence - or deal with - it. Five to ten months after the break up the women began to speak about <i>differentiated fear</i>. This fear was connected to the husband and was not completely overwhelming. The women also described an increasing capacity for action and reduced consequences for their lives in general. After two years, the fear had become a background emotion. The incapacity to act had disappeared, and the women felt they had the opportunity to make themselves feel safer.</p> <p>The findings suggest that woman's breaking up should be interpreted as an act of resistance; thus, fear of the partner is not only something that hampers women, but it could also be regarded as a form of resistance on the part of women. Although fear does not necessarily include action, it contains an unarticulated knowledge of what is desired and not desired.</p>	
23.	Short, L.M., McMahon, P.M., Chervin, D.D., Shelley, G.A., Lezin, N., Sloop, K.S. & Dawkins, N. <b>2000</b> Article	Reasons women stay in abusive relationships, what helps end the violence, barriers, potential early warning signs, resources, racial and location differences.	<p>22 focus groups with urban and rural African American and White women from 5 U.S. regions</p> <p>18-50 years</p>	<p>Participants clearly conveyed that the decision to stay or leave the violent relationship was a highly rational choice that carefully and accurately took into account the pros and cons of the situation. Participants often described the decision to leave the violence as reaching a breaking point. Their responses depicted a sudden shift in how they saw their partners and themselves.</p> <p>Responses to why women stay in violent relationships clustered into the following two broad categories: <i>positive and hopeful reasons</i> and <i>negative reasons</i>.</p> <p>African American women were more inclined to discuss support from family and friends in ending the abusive relationship and limited or negative experiences with social institutions such as shelters. The role of prayer and religion was also especially important among African American women.</p>	Text analysis software: coding and counting frequency of quotes

24.	Belknap, R.A. <b>2000</b>  Article	One Woman's Life Viewed Through the Interpretive Lens of Gilligan's Theory (1982).	Single case study of one Mexican American woman (27 years) who experienced IPV during adolescence	<p>The analysis demonstrates the methodological meaningfulness of reading for conflict and voice in the narratives of women who have experienced abuse. The voice of <i>psychological distress</i> resounds in Eva's adolescence and adult voices.</p> <p>Throughout the text, there are instances where Eva seems to dissociate from herself, where her voice is taken over by debilitating conventions for female behaviour. Towards the end of the interview, <i>political resistance</i>, a construct within resilience, is heard as she began to talk about abuse of all women.</p>	<p>Narrative analysis</p> <p>Reading for conflict and voice in narratives</p> <p>Positional and textual reflexivity</p>
25.	Pilkington, F.B. <b>2000</b>  Article	The lived experience of persisting while wanting to change, as it is lived by women in abusive relationships.	<p>Interviews with 8 women from Chicago</p> <p>Early 20s to late 40s</p>	<p>The sense of quandary in persisting while wanting to change was named '<i>wavering in abiding with the burdensome-cherished</i>'. The 'burdensome' represents those aspects of life with their partners that the women found oppressive and difficult to endure. Coexisting with the burdensome were other aspects that the women cherished.</p> <p>The process of moving with and away from self and others while intending to change for the better was named <i>engaging-distancing with ameliorating intentions</i>.</p> <p>The third idea present in every participant's description was that of an ever-present awareness of having options and the possible consequences of their choices. The notion of considering the possibilities in persisting and also changing was termed <i>anticipating the possibilities of the new</i>.</p>	<p>Thematic content analysis</p> <p>Phenomenology</p>
26.	Rose, L.E., Campbell, J., & Kub, J. <b>2000</b>  Article	The role of social support and family relationships in women's responses to battering.	<p>Semi-structured interviews with 31 predominantly African American women residing in a large urban American city</p> <p>18-53 years (mean age 32 years)</p>	<p>Women used female friends for support more often than family members. Women were constrained from seeking support by a) cultural and societal sanctions against leaving the relationship; b) a pattern of caution in relating to others or forging new relationships; and c) forced isolation/seeing self as isolative. Relationships with family members, especially parents, were not consistently seen as useful sources of support.</p>	<p>Content analysis</p>



27.	Towns, A. & Adams, P. <b>2000</b>  Article	The discourses women employ to explain their understandings of love and violence, and to prevent them from acting against the man's violence.	Interviews with 20 women from support groups for women who had experienced IPV, and who lived in a large New Zealand city	Perfect-love discourses regulate women in a variety of ways to remain in the relationship, to stay silent about the man's violence, and to attempt to change the man. Discursive examples of giving love, possessive love, redeeming love, and nurturing love- were all used to resource perfect-love discourses.  Several women constructed a dual understanding of their partners: by constituting a division between the good and the bad, the woman may be able to rationalise abusive behaviour as not "really him".	Discourse analysis  Feminist poststructuralism
28.	Wood, J.T. <b>2000</b>  Article	Women's Dissociation of Violence From the Men Who Enact It.	Interviews with 20 women  20-53 years (their ages at the time they were involved in the violent relationships ranged from 14 to 32 years)	This study identified a specific symbolic strategy that women used to make sense of their romantic partners' violence in a manner that holds the partner blameless. Prominent in the accounts of women was dissociation of violence from the men who enacted it. Two forms of this strategy emerged.  <i>Not the real him:</i> The most frequently invoked form of dissociation was to separate "the real him" from the partner's actions when "he was not himself".  <i>Beyond his control:</i> Women also accomplished disconnecting the violence from the man who enacts it when they attributed the violence to factors they constructed as beyond his control.	Grounded theory
29.	Lavoie, F., Robitaille, L. & Hébert, M. <b>2000</b>  Article	Teens' views of violence in intimate relationships (how adolescents identify and explain violence in adolescent dating relationships).	6 Focus groups with 24 teens (16 girls) from a teen drop-in centre in an upper and lower-middle class neighbourhood of Quebec City, Canada  14-19 years	The subcategories of violence identified were physical abuse, death threats, sexual abuse, psychological abuse including denigration and insults, social control, indifference, threats of separation and reprisals, damaging reputations, and harassment after separation. Victims perceived violence as a climate of long-term fear and terror rather than a series of gestures.  Perceived causes of violence were grouped at individual, couple and social levels: Individual factors were related to the aggressor such as jealousy, the boy's need for power, or his alcohol and drug consumption, whereas other factors were attributed to the victim, such as provocation by the girl, previous experience with violence, a victim personality type,	Content analysis

				<p>and a strong need for affiliation.</p> <p>Explanations related to the relationship included communication problems and sadomasochism.</p> <p>The teens provided two socially oriented explanations, one about peer group influence, the other on the influence of pornography.</p> <p>Girls may fear reprisals, including gossip, if they attempt to break off their relationships. Some girls may therefore endure abusive relationships in order to maintain their place in the group.</p>	
30.	<p>Hammock, A.C. 2000 Article</p>	<p>The figurative language (similes and metaphors) used by battered women at different points of group therapy.</p>	<p>In-depth interviews with 12 women from a battered women's support centre in Colima, Mexico  25-45 years</p>	<p>Participants used figurative language to describe their feelings and self-identity as a result of male partner violence</p> <p>Figurative language can help women in the process of -freeing themselves from "old" stories and -becoming conscious of a "new narrative"/ discourse.</p>	<p>Structural word analysis</p>
31.	<p>Ellsberg, M.; Peña, R.; Herrera, A.; Liljestrand, J. &amp; Winkvist, A. 2000 Article</p>	<p>The magnitude, characteristics, circumstances and experiences of intimate partner abuse in León, Nicaragua.</p>	<p>A survey with a representative sample of 488 women between the ages of 15-49 in León, Nicaragua  Interviews with 2 women</p>	<p>Both the survey data and the narrative analysis pointed to extreme jealousy and control as constant features of the abusive relationship.</p> <p>The data indicate that battered women frequently experience feelings of shame, isolation and entrapment which, together with a lack of family and community support, often contribute to women's difficulty in recognising and disengaging from a violent relationship.</p> <p>These findings are consistent with theoretical conceptualisations of DV developed in other countries, suggesting that, to a large degree, women's experiences of violence transcend specific cultural contexts.</p>	<p>Narrative analysis using an ecological model</p>

32.	Kearney, M.H. <b>2001</b>  Review	A synthesis of qualitative grounded theory reports.	<p>13 Qualitative research studies (presented in 15 reports produced between 1984 and 1999)</p> <p>Studies retained in the sample used constant comparative techniques and demonstrated building of concepts or theories from original data</p> <p>Reports were excluded that did not describe an analytical approach or employed only nontheoretical descriptive techniques.</p>	<p>These women dealt with the incongruity of violence in their relationships as a basic process of enduring love. <i>Enduring love</i> is conceptualised as a continual struggle to redefine partner violence as temporary, survivable, or reasonable by adhering to values of commitment and self-sacrifice in the relationship and by using strategies to survive and control the psychic and physical harm of unpredictable abuse.</p> <p>In response to shifting definitions of their relationship situations, many women moved through 4 phases: '<i>All I wanted</i>'; '<i>The more I do, the worse I am</i>'; '<i>I had enough</i>'; and '<i>I was finding me</i>'.</p>	Synthesis of grounded theory study findings
33.	Burke, J.G., Gielen, A.C., McDonnell, K.A., O'Campo, P. & Maman, S. <b>2001</b>  Article	Qualitative Exploration of the Transtheoretical Model for understanding how women end abuse in their intimate relationships.	<p>In-depth interviews with 78 women who had participated in a larger study (n=611) of HIV, domestic violence, and women's health</p> <p>Half of the women were HIV positive; 91% were African American Average age 36 years</p>	<p>The qualitative analysis suggests that women talk about the following 5 stages: a) not recognising the abuse as a problem (precontemplation), b) acknowledging the abuse/problem (contemplation), c) considering their options (preparation), d) selecting an option and deciding to take an action toward ending the abuse (action), and e) keeping themselves safe via various strategies (maintenance).</p> <p>Although recognising the problem and considering options seemed to occur almost simultaneously, it is the intention to change that distinguishes women in preparation from those in contemplation. This movement is affected by several factors, including concerns about financial stability and personal safety.</p>	Content analysis
34.	Patzel, B. <b>2001</b>  Article	Women's use of resources in leaving abusive relationships.	<p>Semi-structured interviews with 10 women from outreach programs</p> <p>33-58 years</p>	<p>Themes of <i>turning point</i>, <i>realisation</i>, <i>reframing</i>, <i>agency</i> and <i>self-efficacy</i> emerged from the study. The results suggest a process, although the steps were not sequential and were repeated numerous times before the women were finally successful in leaving. The actual act of leaving was seen to be a gradual one in which the women would slowly work themselves from the relationship.</p>	Thematic content analysis

35.	Hassouneh-Phillips, D. <b>2001</b>  Article	American Muslim Women's Experiences of Leaving Abusive Relationships.	17 unstructured individual interviews and 3 unstructured group interviews with a total of 17 women Muslim women with and without personal experience of IPV  20-59 years	Participants' experiences of leaving abusive partners were family and community focused.  The process of leaving abusive partners as described by participants included 4 stages: <i>reaching the point of saturation</i> , <i>getting khula</i> (an Islamic divorce initiated by wives), <i>facing family and/or community disapproval</i> , and <i>reclaiming of the self</i> Each of these stages illustrates the significance of group-oriented cultural values in shaping participants' experience of leaving their abusers. Through every stage participants' group orientation shaped their thoughts, perceptions and interactions.	Thematic content analysis  Phenomenology
36.	Jackson, S. <b>2001</b>  Article	Occurrence of the popular, idealised romantic narrative in young women's stories of IPV relationships.	Interviews with 24 older adolescents / high school students  16-18 years	Young women's stories of their relationships with abusive boyfriends bore little resemblance to the happy-ever-after fairy tale romance. Fairy tale beginnings promised hope of the "perfect" relationship but progressed into plots of emotional abuse, sexual coercion or physical violence. Women struggled with competing positions, and resisted the positioning of themselves as passive victims. Avoidance of victim status also incorporated not labelling boyfriends as abusers and/or not labelling the experience (at the time of the relationship) as abusive.	Narrative analysis  Feminist poststructuralist framework
37.	Wood, J.T. <b>2001</b>  Article	How women narrate themselves and their partners' violence.  The role of culturally endorsed gender and romance narratives in normalising violence.	Interviews with 20 women from university classes  20-53 years; ages at the time they were involved in the violent relationships ranged from 14 to 32 years	The women's accounts were framed by gender and romance narratives that were used to explain and justify violence. All participants placed themselves within Western culture's primary gender narrative, which prescribes and normalises dominance and superiority for men, and deference and dependence for women. Another prominent indicator of participants' acceptance of the established gender narrative was their internalisation of the expectation that women should care for their partners.	Grounded theory  "Narrative work" premises
38.	Migliaccio, T.A. <b>2001</b>  Article	Narratives of husbands who have been abused by their wives.	12 married men (interviews and written email correspondence)	This study presents 3 messages concerning the development of masculine identities that appear most relevant to the informants' experiences: self-reliance, stoicism and control. A challenge to any of these characteristics could have a devastating effect upon the maintenance of a man's masculinity, resulting in embarrassment.	Thematic content analysis

39.	Armstrong, T.G.; Heideman, G.; Corcoran, K.J.; Fisher, B.; Medina, K.L.; Schafer, J. <b>2001</b>  Article	Reasons underlying interpartner disagreement about the occurrence of IPV.	Open-ended questionnaires and interviews with 48 women and men with and without histories of IPV (12 male batterers; 12 battered women, and 12 men & 12 women not reporting IPV)  20-56 years	Participants think women and men remember differently (men remember facts while women remember the emotional content of fights); women remember more than men; both choose what they want to remember, and both remember that they were right in the conflict.  IPV participants were significantly more likely to state that: -victims (usually women) are more likely to remember violence in comparison to perpetrators; -men and women will often lie about a conflict if the law gets involved; -women lie about what happened out of fear for their well-being; -men and women have different definitions of what constitutes a fight; and -men and women forget because they want to forget.	Content analysis/ categorisation
40.	Cavanagh, K., Dobash, R.E., Dobash, R.P. & Lewis, R. <b>2001</b>  Article	An examination of men's and women's accounts of men's responses to violence by applying and developing a conceptual framework derived from Goffman's (1971) notion of 'remedial work'.	Interviews and questionnaires with 122 men and 136 women partners of abusers. All the men in the study had been convicted of at least one offence involving violence against their partner, and many had been charged with similar offences in the past	Revealed are the exculpatory and expiatory discourses which dominate men's narratives and which expose the purposeful yet paradoxical nature of their responses to violence, directed at mitigating and obfuscating culpability while at the same time seeking forgiveness and absolution.  The authors suggest that through these devices men -seek to impose their own definitions upon their woman partner and thereby neutralise or eradicate her experience of abuse, and -control the ways in which she interprets and responds to it.  The three devices of <i>accounts, apologies and requests</i> were applied to men's responses to violence.	Content analysis- informed by a theoretical model  Social-constructivist and power elements of language acknowledged.
41.	Wuest, J. & Merritt-Gray, M. <b>2001</b>  Article	The process of leaving abusive relationships, focusing on the last stage, moving on, during which the women move beyond framing their lives as survivors of an abusive relationship.	Unstructured interviews with 15 Caucasian women from small towns in eastern Canada  The women ranged in age from their late teens to mid-50's  About half the women had accessed women's shelters at some point in the leaving process.	The researchers discovered the basic social-psychological process of ' <i>reclaiming self</i> ' (a process of reinstating self in the larger social context) in which women voyaged through 4 stages: counteracting abuse, breaking free, not going back, and moving on.  During the 'moving on' stage, women move beyond framing their lives as survivors of an abusive relationship through the processes of <i>figuring it out, putting it in its rightful place, launching new relationships, and taking on a new image.</i>	Grounded theory  Feminist perspective

42.	Loseke, D.R. <b>2001</b>  Book chapter	How formula stories shape the experience of women who participate in battered women's support groups.	4 support groups and 10 consecutive weekly meetings held in a shelter for battered women	<p>Support groups and shelters encourage women to make sense of their non-understandable lived realities by narrating their practical experiences as those of wife abuse. In a sense, support groups are storytelling groups that provide members with "better" stories, populated with <i>familiar institutional identities</i>.</p> <p>Support groups do not simply assert identities and definitions for their members. Members undertake considerable narrative identity work in order to articulate the battered woman image with the lived experiences of group members. However, group members do not necessarily rely upon the group's interpretive blueprints to format their identities and experiences.</p>	Narrative analysis
43.	Riger, S., Raja, S. & Camacho, J. <b>2002</b>  Article	The radiating impact of violence.	<p>Interviews with 15 women one year after their stay in a battered women's shelter</p> <p>19-38 years (mean age 30 years)</p>	<p>Violence against women had serious ramifications for those in the woman's support system, particularly for her extended family.</p> <p>The typical <i>first-order effects</i> of violence on women in this study included reports of physical injury, depression, fear, low self-esteem, and substance abuse.</p> <p>The <i>second-order impact</i> of violence affected women's ability to function in the world and impaired their relationships with others. This included relationships with family/ friends, intimate partners, and children; ability to work/ attend school, and ability in obtaining stable housing.</p> <p><i>Third-order effects</i> of violence demonstrated how others in a woman's life were also affected by battering.</p>	<p>Content analysis</p> <p>Ecological approach</p>
44.	Eisikovits, Z. & Winstok, Z. <b>2002</b>  Article	The structure and content of recollections of violent events among cohabiting partners who remain together in spite of the violence.	Separate in-depth interviews with 24 couples identified through social service agencies and municipal police departments in northern Ireland	Both men and women living in violent relationships described a contextual variation ranging from choosing to stay to being prevented from leaving. The memory of violence was constructed in a manner meant to achieve coherence with the appropriate context. Although most women were identified in the content category of being prevented from leaving and having no place to go, the majority of men were in the category of choosing to stay.	Attention to structure and language

				The findings indicate that the more individuals perceive staying as a choice, the narrower and weaker are the scope and intensity of memories of violence. Conversely, the more staying is perceived as forced by circumstances, the more memories tend to be expanded and intense.	
45.	Few, A.L. & Bell-Scott, P. <b>2002</b>  Article	The decision-making processes and coping strategies of Black college women in terminating psychologically abusive dating relationships.	Semi-structured interviews with 6 Black single women enrolled in a south-eastern university  18-30 years	Leaving was a four-stage process: a) <i>assessment of the relationship</i> ; b) <i>separation</i> from the abusive partner; c) <i>reestablishment of social networks</i> ; d) <i>declaration of self-empowerment</i> .  Coping strategies included self-healing resources.	Grounded theory  Black feminist approach
46.	Davis, R.E. <b>2002</b>  Article	Women's inner resources for surviving abusive experiences, and protection strategies for future relationships.	Interviews with 17 women from a community sample in Pennsylvania, US  27-56 years	The process of leave-taking and terminating the relationship with the abuser were not always the same events. Children were the most common reason for this variance.  Participants shared perspectives that characterised inner resources. These inner resources are grouped as the themes of <i>strength and survival</i> , <i>resilience</i> , and <i>self-protection</i> . All three themes are descriptive of the control that women sought to regain or retain self-identity plus emotional, physical and mental safety. Although strength enabled the women to terminate abusive relationships, it also enabled them to stay when leaving might have posed a greater threat to their survival. Resilient women used hope, spirituality, a sense of humour and support systems to survive.	Thematic content analysis  Phenomenology
47.	Carter, S. <b>2002</b>  Article	The author's personal account of spousal abuse and how it compares to academic discourses.	Diaries and reminisces of 1 woman (the author herself)	The author considers how <i>subject-position</i> shapes the meaning of words. She describes her uncertainties about what it means to be "abused" as opposed to what society decides constitutes acceptable/ unacceptable behaviour/  The author points out that the recollections of her experiences do not knit together in a linear way, much in the same way that abuse is not always linear in all its facets, nor do they weave into a coherent text (as does scholarly discourse). Such is the predicament she points out of a subject (such as herself), being the subject to a word like 'abuse'.	The influence of subject-position on language and meaning-making

48.	Belknap, R.A. <b>2002</b>  Article	Voices of Separation and Connection in Women Who Have Experienced Abuse.	Semi-structured interviews with 18 women from rural areas and small towns in an American Midwestern state  25-51 years	Four distinct voices of separation and connection emerged ( <i>Voice of separation; Voice of self separate from self but connected with others; Voice of self finding self; and, Voice of self-knowledge and connection with self and others</i> ). These voices become progressively more relational across the categories, forming a continuum.  As the women began to include connections and relationships in their descriptions of self, they also progressed from very negative to positive descriptions of self. This finding supports the assertions of self-in-relation theorists regarding the importance of relationships to a woman's sense of self.	Thematic content analyses- informed by a theory of moral development  Some textual reflexivity
49.	Yoshihama, M. <b>2002</b>  Article	Ways in which women in Japan perceive and respond to domestic violence.	Focus groups with 18 women  20-60 years	The women's participation in the study indicated a certain degree of recognition that their partners' actions constituted "violence", subjectively defined by each participant. This recognition appeared to have emerged out of complex cognitive processes in attempting to make sense of what was happening to them.  Women described a dynamic of entrapment in violence. They recounted fear, pain, disbelief, helplessness, a sense of powerlessness, self-doubt and confusion. Some fought back literally, and others in various symbolic ways.  Male partners not only used serious physical and sexual violence against women, but were also quite expressive in degrading individual women and women's roles and places in society.  The web of 'entrapment' was strikingly similar to the experience of domestic violence among battered women in Western countries, and among those of Japanese descent in the US.	Thematic content analysis



50.	Taylor, J.Y. <b>2002</b>  Article	Research as a potential avenue of resistance and healing for African American women survivors of intimate male partner violence.	In-depth semi-structured interviews with 21 women African American women living in Washington  24-70 years (mean age of 39)	The women disclosed how they benefited from participation. The benefits emerged as three themes: <i>healing the self</i> , <i>helping others</i> , and <i>envisioning new life directions</i> . For many African American women survivors in this study, participating in this research project was a symbolic way of talking back to the men who abused them and to social structures that attempt to maintain them in positions of silence and subjugation.	Thematic content analysis  Black feminist ethnographic framework
51.	Tang, C.S., Wong, D. & Cheung, F.M. <b>2002</b>  Article	How Chinese women are socially constructed as legitimate victims of violence against women.	Focus groups with male and female college students, male and female blue-collar workers, professionals, and homemakers in 3 Chinese societies	<p>This study found that Chinese tend to use psychiatric explanations in their explanations and discussions of violence against women, and believe that men who commit violence are sick. This belief removes responsibility from men and lays the foundation for victim-blaming explanations.</p> <p>Participants' psychiatric explanations depict perpetrators as victims, who suffered childhood trauma, were betrayed by people they trusted (mothers and girlfriends), or were bullied by women (sisters, wives and female bosses). These explanations focus on the role of women in creating men's hatred and propensity for violence against women.</p> <p>Male participants were more likely than women to endorse love scripts that romanticise acts of violence, and represent battered women as loved by their husbands.</p> <p>Young and educated women were more likely to endorse feminist perspectives, and to view victim blaming as reinforcing women's inferior status in society.</p>	Thematic content analysis  Feminist social constructionism
52.	Davis, R.E. <b>2002</b>  Article	The experience of leave-taking from abusive relationships.	Interviews with 17 women from a community sample in Pennsylvania, US	<p>Most of the women felt that alcohol and/or drug use was a contributing factor to the abuse that they sustained in their relationships. The themes extrapolated from the interview data were: <i>careful timing</i>, <i>accessibility and use of support systems</i>, and <i>cultivation of intuition</i>.</p> <p>These themes were validated by the women as principal elements that assisted them eventually to leave abusive relationships. These elements were critical in decision making and ultimately led to survival.</p>	Thematic content analysis  Phenomenology

53.	Anderson, D.K. & Saunders, D.G. <b>2003</b>  Review	Review of qualitative research that conceptualises leaving an abusive relationship as a process.	28 publications published between 1985 and 2001	<p>Four facets of leaving an abusive relationship are reviewed: a) <i>factors related to initially leaving an abusive partner</i> (a review of quantitative research predicting women's stay/leave decisions); b) <i>the process of leaving</i> an abusive relationship (a review of qualitative research that conceptualises leaving as a process); c) the <i>psychological well-being of survivors</i> after leaving; and d) the <i>predictors</i> of this well-being.</p> <p>Process studies typically differ qualitatively from stay/leave studies in conceptualising leaving as a complex process involving many decisions and actions taking place over a period of months or years. According to these studies, leaving begins with changes at the emotional and cognitive levels well before an actual physical departure.</p>	
54.	Nordien, R., Alpaslan, N. & Pretorius, B. <b>2003</b>  Article	South African Muslim Women's Experiences of Domestic Violence.	<p>In-depth semi-structured interviews with 6 women in marital relationships from the Nelson Mandela Metropole, South Africa</p> <p>23-59 years</p>	<p>Women found the emotional abuse to be the worst kind of abuse given that the psychological effects of the abuse were long-lasting.</p> <p>Participants tried to make sense of the abuse in terms of the precipitating factors contributing to domestic violence. They suggested the following as explanations: alcohol, money, power, an identity crisis and low self-esteem.</p> <p>Participants identified the following factors that caused them to remain in their abusive marital relationships: patriarchal belief systems; economic dependence; staying for the sake of the children; fear of rejection; protecting his image; and hope for change.</p>	Content analysis
55.	Hassouneh-Phillips, D. <b>2003</b>  Article	Spirituality in Abused American Muslim Women's Lives.	<p>17 American Muslim women with and without a history of IPV (17 unstructured individual interviews; 3 unstructured group interviews)</p> <p>20-59 years</p>	<p>Coping mechanisms included listening to Koranic recitation, prayer and meditation. For some, spirituality was also a source of vulnerability. This was manifested in one of two ways: a) a belief that this life does not matter; and b) abusers' manipulation of religious text to maintain power and control.</p> <p>The idea that women will be rewarded for suffering as they strive to keep their families intact emerged from the narrative accounts. Abused women's perceived need to meet marital</p>	Thematic content analysis

				<p>religious obligations hampered their ability to care for themselves and maintain their safety.</p> <p>Many participants reported spiritual changes after their abusive relationships had ended. On this continuum there were two opposite endpoints- those who retained their original belief systems, and those who remained Muslims but chose to reinterpret some aspects of Islamic doctrine which they perceived to be disempowering to women.</p>	
56.	Smith, M.E. <b>2003</b>  Article	Recovery from Intimate Partner Violence.	Interviews with 15 women from a mid-size southern US city  24-64 years	The thematic structure of a woman's journey in recovering from IPV is comprised of three distinct but connected phases of her life: <i>the abusive past</i> , <i>the struggles of freeing herself physically and emotionally from the abuse/ past</i> , and finally <i>the healing/growth</i> that occurs as a woman releases herself from the bitterness and anger of the past.	Thematic content analysis  Phenomenology
57.	Buchbinder, E. & Eisikovits, Z. <b>2003</b>  Article	The experience of shame as a central existential theme in battered women's experiences in their family of origin and during their subsequent lives with their violent partners.	Interviews with 20 Jewish-Israeli women with experiences of battering	<p>The authors look at shame as the focus of emotional abuse and as an obstacle to breaking free from it.</p> <p>Shame was a dominant existential life motif carried from the family of origin by the battered women interviewed. In their violence-ridden marriages, shame became a means of hurting, a tool for manipulating the other, and a means of aggressive exploitation by the perpetrator. In battered women's attempts to leave, the social aspects of shame became active, pressing women to stay in the marriage while feeling vulnerable. In this study, gendered messages of shame stemming from patriarchal values in the family of origin were particularly influential when women were trying to end violence by getting out of abusive relationships.</p>	Thematic content analysis  Phenomenology
58.	Tolman, D.L., Spencer, R., Rosen-Reynoso, M. & Porche, M.V. <b>2003</b>	Early adolescent girls' and boys' descriptions of their early romantic heterosexual relationships.	Two samples (combined n=100) of early adolescents  <i>Study 1:</i> Survey and interviews with 72 students (46 girls and 26 boys) chosen from among the	<p>Results from Study 1:</p> <p>One of the central tenets of compulsory heterosexuality that pervaded these young teens' descriptions of their romantic relationships was the belief that most boys are, by nature, sexual predators, i.e. <i>'boys will be boys'</i>. Girls described the myriad ways in which they armoured themselves against this anticipated sexual aggression.</p>	Thematic content analysis  Listening Guide method of narrative analysis  Feminist perspective

	Article		<p>participants in a longitudinal study on sexual health in a North-eastern sub/urban middle school</p> <p><i>Study 2:</i> 6 focus groups conducted during a six month workshop with a sample of 28 girls who were enrolled in an after-school program run by a grassroots feminist organisation. The majority of the girls were early adolescents, although the ages ranged from 11 to 19. Most were African American or Latina</p>	<p>Boys described both a public display of aggressive behaviours towards girls and talking about girls in a sexually explicit manner with other boys. Showing that they can do sexual things with girls enhanced boys' masculinity and hence their status among male peers.</p> <p>Results from Study 2: The following themes arose consistently across the focus groups: <i>male dominance and control, threat and danger, distrust of other girls</i> experienced in the context of boys, and <i>gendered behaviour</i> in relationships.</p> <p>The boys were viewed in part as a commodity that provided certain resources (i.e. gifts, food) which the girls wanted or needed. Girls accused other girls of being jealous and attempting to sabotage their relationships.</p> <p>In general, the authors interpreted a high level of compliance in girls' reports of being objectified by boys and men. Although the stories of these girls tended towards distressing enactments of compulsory heterosexuality, there were also glimmers of resistance.</p>	
59.	Cavanagh, K. 2003  Article	Understanding Women's Responses to Domestic Violence.	<p>In-depth structured interviews with 136 women</p> <p>18-57 years</p> <p>Data was drawn from The Violent Men Study- a longitudinal and comparative evaluation of two Scottish programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence</p>	<p>Findings reveal women's responses to violence are both dynamic and complex. Women in this study actively responded to violence in diverse ways. As women's definitions of their experiences changed, many developed a repertoire of responses/strategies employed to reduce/stop the violence and to resist men's efforts to impose dominant mitigatory understandings of their experiences of violence. Importantly, women's responses were played out in relation to men's responses, i.e. <i>the interconnectedness of women's and men's responses</i> to men's violence against women was highlighted.</p> <p>The women had much invested in saving, protecting and changing their relationships and two dominant themes were identified in their responses: 1) women <i>actively struggled</i> to make the relationship non-violent, and devised strategies to this end; and 2) women <i>reacted to</i> and reflected on men's responses to their use of violence.</p>	<p>Content analysis</p> <p>Contextual and interactional framework</p> <p>Social-constructivist and power elements of language acknowledged</p>

<p>60.</p>	<p>Boonzaier, F. &amp; De La Rey, C. <b>2003</b>  Article</p>	<p>How women's reconstructions of violence either resist or sanction hegemonic gendered norms.</p>	<p>Narrative interviews with 15 women recruited through advertisements in Mitchell's Plain, South Africa  30-52 years</p>	<p>The authors showed how women's naming and making sense of their experiences of violence were linked to the particular context within which their experiences occurred. Women highlighted the importance of economic abuse and control in their lives. Although women faced a number of social structural constraints, they also exercised agency and made attempts to end violence in their lives.</p> <p>By attending to women's talk about violence, the authors showed how the women either took up or resisted hegemonic constructions of femininity and masculinity. In their narratives, women evoked conflicting and shifting constructions of themselves and their partners and challenged gender-stereotypical roles in many ways.</p> <p>By acknowledging women's agency, the authors show how women depart from the supposed norm and open up new discourses of resistance for women.</p>	<p>Discourse/ narrative analysis  Feminist poststructuralism</p>
<p>61.</p>	<p>Burke, J.G., Denison, J.A., Gielen, A.C., McDonnell, K.A. &amp; O'Campo, P. <b>2004</b>  Article</p>	<p>An Application of the Transtheoretical Model to women's experiences of ending intimate partner violence.</p>	<p>In-depth interviews with 23 women from OBGYN clinics and a hospital-based HIV primary care clinic in Baltimore  All except one of the 23 women were African American.  21-50 years (average 38 years)</p>	<p>Results show that women attempting to end abuse within intimate relationships do use processes of change to facilitate movement from one stage to the next. Women in early stages of change use cognitive processes. Women in later stages use behavioural processes.</p> <p>The 7 processes of change used by women ending abuse were: Consciousness raising; Self-re-evaluation; Environmental re-evaluation; Social liberation; Helping relationships; Self-liberation; and Stimulus control.</p> <p>Following identification of the abusive behaviour as a problem, women talked about the pros and cons associated with ending the abuse (decisional balance). Many women remained in the contemplation stage for a substantial period because, at the time, they believed the cons of changing the status quo of the relationship were greater than the pros. Once action was initiated, a woman's confidence contributed to her ability to both end the abuse and to stay free from abuse (self-efficacy).</p>	<p>Content analysis guided by theory</p>

62.	Leal, C. & Brackley, M. <b>2004</b>  Article	An examination of women's descriptions of the events within and surrounding their relationships.	Life history interviews with 17 women from a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States  18-60 years	The themes that were described most frequently occurred within the microsystem and included the abuse within the relationship; the perpetrator; and the victim protecting the perpetrator.  The second most frequently described themes were the extended family system and friends and co-workers which fall within the mesosystem. Less frequently occurring themes correlated with Bronfenbrenner's descriptions of the macrosystem and exosystem.	Thematic content analysis  Ecological perspective
63.	Taylor, J.Y. <b>2004</b>  Article	African American women's strategies for recovering after leaving IPV relationships.	12 African American women who lived in Washington  24-70 years (mean age of 39)	Survivorship-thriving was the overarching process. 6 themes related to this process were identified: a) <i>Sharing secrets/ Shattering silence</i> - sharing information about the abuse with others; b) <i>Reclaiming the self</i> - defining oneself separate from abuser and society; c) <i>Renewing the spirit</i> - nurturing and restoring the spiritual, emotional and physical self; d) <i>Self-healing through forgiveness</i> - forgiving their partners for the abuse and violence; e) <i>Finding inspiration in the future</i> - looking to the future with optimism; and f) <i>Self-generativity by engaging in social activism</i> - participating in prosocial activities to promote social change.	Thematic content analysis  Black feminist ethnographic framework
64.	Black, B.M. & Weisz, A.N. <b>2004</b>  Article	Thoughts and attitudes of Mexican American youth about dating violence.	Separate gender focus groups with 15 males and 15 females from a community youth sample  11-17 years (mean age 13.4 years)	5 major themes emerged relating to dating violence: <i>violent context, retaliation, gender stereotyping, intervention, and willingness to seek help</i> .  Results suggest that Mexican American youth deal with many of the same issues related to dating violence as youth of other ethnicities. However, culture did influence their thoughts about violence, and how they might respond. The influence of culture was especially reflected in their endorsement of gender stereotypes and their decisions about whom to turn to for help.	Thematic content analysis
65.	Gadd, D. <b>2004</b>  Article	The intersubjective dynamics between interviewer and interviewee in a narrative of intimate partner violence.	Re-analysis of interview with 1 male participant	The case illustrates that the kind of knowledge constructed in a research interview depends not only on the interviewee's actual biographical experiences, but also on the intersubjective dynamics between the two concerned parties.	Constitutive role of interviewer  Use of positional reflexivity in opening up

				The extent to which the interviewer and interviewee feel safe enough to disclose and question depends upon some unconscious psychic dynamics. Furthermore, a psychosocial understanding of interviewer-interviewee dynamics is needed.	alternative readings of data
66.	Bent-Goodley, T. <b>2004</b>  Article	African American Women's perceptions about domestic violence.	Focus groups with 14 self-selected women from a New York social services agency  18-48 years (mean age 31 years)	4 main categories were identified: <i>perceptions of domestic violence services</i> , <i>inaccessibility</i> of domestic violence services, <i>the need for public education</i> , and <i>the child welfare connection</i> .	Thematic content analysis
67.	Horrill, K.E. & Berman, H. <b>2004</b>  Report	Issues that surround a woman's ability to remain out of an abusive relationship.	Open-ended interviews with 10 women in Canada	Four themes emerged that reflect their ability to remain out of violent relationships: <i>Rocking the Boat: A Change in Beliefs</i> ; <i>(Re)discovering self</i> ; <i>Sustaining Relationships</i> ; and <i>In Case I Fall: The Safety Net of Helping Agencies</i> .	Feminist narrative inquiry  Content analysis
68.	Enosh, G. & Buchbinder, E. <b>2005</b>  Article	The co-construction of narrative styles of domestic violence as transacted between interviewer and interviewee.	Re-analysis of separate interviews with 20 cohabiting couples in large urban area in northern Israel- who had reported at least one incident of violence to social service and police departments during the year prior to data collection	The emergent narrative styles of the constructions of domestic violence are shown to be the product of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Four different narrative styles are identified. The narrative style as: <i>a struggle</i> ; as <i>deflection</i> ; as <i>negotiation</i> ; and as a <i>self-observation process</i> .  The emerging narrative styles ranged from obvious and overt struggle on one hand to cooperation on the other. At the conflictual end of the range, the interview became a power struggle between interviewer and interviewee, in which each sought to prioritise or force his or her definition of the couple's reality on the other, a struggle that usually ended unresolved. At the other end of the range, the interaction was characterised as a cooperative effort by both sides to facilitate a reflective recall of events, processes, and emotions by the interviewee.	Power relationships in interviews  Constitutive role of interviewer
69.	Flinck, A., Paavilainen, E. & Åstedt-Kurki, P. <b>2005</b>	Women's experiences and survival of intimate partner violence.	Open-ended interviews with 7 women from a voluntary organisation in Finland working with abused women and children	IPV was associated with conflicts between familism and individualism, independence and commitment, gender roles and sexuality. It was typical of the abusive couple relationship that the women had married to escape a distressing climate in the parental home, and expected marriage to give them a feeling of security.	Thematic content analysis

	Article			The women sought help when their health and social relationships got worse. Seeking help was the result of lengthy consideration and the women needed resources to leave. An awareness of the problem, taking action, counselling and social relationships helped them survive.	
70.	Few, A.L. & Rosen, K.H. 2005  Article	How women's vulnerabilities link to their decisions to stay in abusive relationships.	Secondary analysis of semi-structured interviews with 28 young women in dating relationships from two rural south-eastern universities  Mean age 22 years	<p>The authors frame the presentation of their results within The Vulnerability Conceptual Model. This model describes the interplay of risk factors and resiliencies that seemed to contextualise women's decisions to stay in abusive relationships. The model encompasses two dimensions of vulnerabilities: relational vulnerability and situational vulnerability.</p> <p>The abused White and Black women in this sample experienced similar relational and situational vulnerabilities that enhanced the likelihood of them remaining in chronically abusive dating relationships. Life-stage and life-circumstance stress exacerbated feelings of entrapment for both Black and White women. Most were at a stage in their lives where they wanted a relationship to accentuate their social, educational or professional pursuits.</p>	Content analysis-informed by a conceptual model
71.	Enosh, G. & Buchbinder, E. 2005  Article	The reconstruction of memory of participants in domestic violence.	<p>Re-analysis of separate interviews with 20 cohabiting couples drawn from a larger study of violence against women conducted in northern Israel</p> <p>Couples had reported at least one incident of violence to social service and police departments in a large urban area in northern Israel during the year prior to data collection</p> <p>Men ranged in age between 21-51 years (M=33); women between 21-43 years (M=30)</p>	<p>Participants in domestic violence, be they batterers, victims or involved in mutual violence, are faced with a choice of the level of experiential distance they want to maintain with respect to the original experience and the manner in which they wish to arrange the perception of violence in their lives.</p> <p>In the process of remembering, the level of relating to the experience may be described as existing on a plane defined by two axes: the level of <i>emotional reliving of the experience</i>, and the level of <i>abstraction</i> one uses. To describe this range of ways of reconstructing experience, the authors use the following terms: '<i>Knowledge</i>', '<i>Awareness of mental processes</i>', '<i>Awareness of identity</i>', '<i>Awareness of values</i>', '<i>Awareness of characteristics</i>', and '<i>Alienation</i>'.</p>	<p>Narrative conceptualisation of memory</p> <p>Thematic and conversational discourse analysis</p> <p>Reflexivity regarding the context and constitutive role of interviewer</p>



				Women tend to lean toward 'knowledge' (defined as direct remembering and reliving, with complete details of the event), while 'alienation' (characterised by a refusal to observe, reflect or remember) is characteristic mainly of men.	
72.	Johnson, S.B., Frattaroli, S., Campbell, J., Wright, J., Pearson-Fields, A.S. & Cheng, T.L. <b>2005</b>  Article	The impact of gender-based violence on the lives of urban adolescents.	13 focus groups with 120 urban, predominant African American youth from three high-violence settings in Washington: a large, urban high school, a training centre for disadvantaged youth, and a school for adjudicated youth  14-22 years	Participants did not talk about violence without discussing relationships and gender-based violence. Participants experienced gender-based violence in a number of social roles: as witnesses to domestic violence at home, as victims of intimate partner and dating violence, or as peer observers of harassing and violent behaviour. Many youth had concluded that partner violence was sometimes acceptable.  Males described gender-based violence as an emotional catharsis that could help relieve frustration. Using violence was seen as a way of bolstering self-esteem and maintaining a sense of power over partners. Both male and female participants cited jealousy and punishment for being disrespectful as reasons for violence. Many girls thought that accepting abuse was a good way to secure the interest of a man.  Both males' and females' perspectives on gender-based violence were informed by watching their peers navigate their own relationships.	Thematic content analysis
73.	Berkel, L.A.; Furlong, A.N.; Hickman, A.A. & Blue, E.L. <b>2005</b>  Article	Black women's beliefs about abusive relationships.	Open-ended questionnaires with a convenience sample of 64 Black female students recruited from a small historically Black Christian college in the South	The authors identify some potential vulnerabilities or risk factors around issues of dating and courtship violence: participants were much more likely to list physical and verbal abuse as being characteristic of abusive relationships; few considered sexual abuse in their definitions; respondents saw victims' low self-esteem and insecurity as at least partially contributing to abuse in African American relationships.  Other potential vulnerabilities include the tolerance of verbal abuse, and difficulty some women experience in ending abusive relationships. One social factor that may inhibit Black women's help-seeking is the belief that there are a limited number of eligible Black men available to date or marry.	Content analysis  Open ended questionnaires

				One obvious resource for this group was their faith and the support of their church, suggesting that for Black women things of a religious nature are important in evaluating and understanding relationships.	
74.	Mahlstedt, D.L. & Welsh, L.A. 2005  Article	College students' perceptions of causes of violence in heterosexual dating relationships.	Study 1 examined 107 participants' written causal explanations for dating violence. The participants were 68 female and 39 male undergraduates who participated as part of a requirement for an introductory psychology course. The sample came from a public university in the north-eastern US  The second study focused on 70 students' ratings of cause in 15 scenarios ending with the man hitting the woman	6 categories of causal explanation of dating violence emerged from the content analysis: <i>power, gender socialisation, relationship, communication, alcohol</i> and <i>individual</i> . Participants acknowledge power as an important cause of violence. Gender socialisation reflected commonly held views of femininity and masculinity. Within the relationship category, jealousy was the primary theme. The category of communication included emotional expression. Some perceived violence as a natural consequence of an outburst of extreme emotion.  Relationship and communication problems were primary causes when dating violence was presented in a concrete situation, whereas power and gender socialisation were primary causes when presented as a social problem. Of the six variables, alcohol is the least mentioned overall.	Content analysis  Open-ended questionnaires
75.	Hydén, M. 2005  Article	The relationships between power, responsibility and activity as reflected in the various ways battered women positioned themselves in their narratives of leaving.	Interviews with 10 women (over a 2 year period) who sought refuge at a shelter for battered women in Stockholm, Sweden, after leaving their abusive husband  25-41 years	The analysis identified three different storylines, accompanied by different subject positions. These basic positions cast the abused woman as: <i>Wounded, Self-blaming, or Bridge-building</i> . These positions were associated with relational themes such as <i>vulnerability, isolation</i> and <i>connectedness</i> , respectively. The women cast themselves as opponents to violence, and portrayed their resisting selves in different ways, associated with positioning.	Narrative analysis
76.	Dunn, J.L. 2005  Review	A review of the literature providing reasons for why battered women "stay" in abusive relationships.	Review	The author reviews images of battered women as "survivors" in early and contemporary activists' discourses. Most of the early representations of battered women emphasise their emotionality and their victimisation, while the more recent constructions of this collective identity emphasise their rationality and their agency. Both "victim" and "survivor" typifications provide accounts for why battered women stay in violent relationships, thus providing a vocabulary of motive.	Literature review  Ethnographic content analysis

77.	Chung, D. <b>2005</b>  Article	The micro-practices of heterosexuality in young people's relationships.	Interviews with 40 young people (25 females, 15 males) recruited from secondary schools and youth services in Australia 15-19 years (mean age 17 years)	In summary, young women's experiences and definitions of violence, abuse and sexual coercion in relationships are mediated by the competing and contradictory discourses of heterosexuality, romance, gender, individualism and equality.	Discourse analysis
78.	Frederick Amar, A.; Alexy, E.M. <b>2005</b>  Article	The impact of the experience of dating violence on the daily lives of college women.	210 American female college women  18-25 years (mean age 19.3 years)	The major thematic categories that emerged were: emotional distress, distrust and using extra precautions, disconnected and distant in relationships, self-discontentment, disclaiming the experience, feeling disenfranchised, life disruption, and turning a situation from disempowering to empowering.	Thematic content analysis  Open-ended question on questionnaire
79.	Fredland, N.M.; Ricardo, I.B.; Campbell, J.C.; Sharps, P.W.; Kub, J.K.; Yonas, M. <b>2005</b>  Article	The phenomenon of dating violence according to the adolescent perspective.	Focus groups with 54 middle school urban youth (22 boys and 32 girls)  11-13 years	Four themes emerged: <i>respect versus disrespect, influence of peers, cost and benefit of sexual activity and violence as an acceptable response.</i>	Thematic content analysis
80.	Nash, S.T. <b>2005</b>  Article	Black women's experiences with intimate male partner violence using a womanist perspective.	Individual, semi-structured interviews with 9 formerly abused women  33-69 years	Women revealed an obligation to act as Black men's caretakers, whether by protecting their masculinity, social image, and the life chances of their Black sons or by responding through a sense of religious duty. External issues such as racism and other racial, class and social disparities might discourage some Black women from enlisting help.	Content analysis  Womanist, constructionist framework
81.	Serquina-Ramiro, L. <b>2005</b>  Article	Perceptions about intimate relationships including perspectives of pressure and sexual coercion as experienced by unmarried Filipino adolescent males and females.	Key informant interviews, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and community survey with male and female unmarried Filipino adolescents  15-19 years	The study revealed variations in the mechanisms of sexual coercion. Verbal insistence was most common among females, whereas bribery was more significantly applied to young men.  This study highlighted the extent to which coercive sex can be consensual. A number of respondents admitted having eventually agreed to engage in physical intimacy with their partners after a series of persuasions, sweet talking, pleading, bribery, and the like.	Thematic content analysis

82.	Panchanadeswaran, S.; Koverola, C. <b>2005</b>  Article	Abuse characteristics, consequences of abuse, and help-seeking behaviour.	Semi-structured interviews with 90 women recruited from help sources (counselling and shelter centres)  Mean age 27 years.	The women experienced daily abuse that was extremely severe, and many lived under the constant threat of murder.  The women made repeated and continuous attempts to seek help. Family and friends were helpful in providing short-term instrumental support. Many women described their husbands' obsessive behaviours and constant nagging suspicions of infidelity. Many women highlighted their husbands' use of alcohol and the lack of or insufficient dowry system as primary reasons for violence.	Content analysis
83.	Bhowon, U.; Munbauhal, H. <b>2005</b> Article	The dynamics of domestic violence.	6 focus groups with 30 married women (age range 25-42 years) living in a shelter	The principal causes of violence were unequal power relations, sexual abuse, extra-marital affairs, jealousy, isolation, poverty and dependence on partner, alcohol and drugs abuse.	Content analysis
84.	Lammers, M.; Ritchie, J.; Robertson, N. <b>2005</b>  Article	The impact - and women's experience - of emotional abuse within intimate relationships.	Group analysis of individual written memories of 7 women from emotionally abusive backgrounds  25-60 years (mean age 49 years)	The study found that participants experienced three distinct forms of emotional abuse, which included <i>dominant control</i> , <i>silent control</i> and <i>manipulation</i> . The consequences of emotional abuse included the evocation of shame, emotional loneliness, despair, guilt, confusion, fear, anger, diminished self-esteem and diminished identity.	Content analysis  Feminist perspective
85.	Rosen, K.H.; Stith, S.M.; Few, A.L.; Daly, K.L.; Tritt, D.R. <b>2005</b>  Article	To further test Johnson's typology.	In-depth interviews with an American community sample of 15 bidirectionally violent couples (both partners either emotionally or physically abusive)  The average age of women was 33 years, and the average age of the men was 36 years.	Couples fit the description of three of the four types of Johnsons' typology (2000): CCV (common couple violence), MVC (mutual violent control), and VR (violent resistance).  Some couples seemed to battle for control of the relationship, one argument at a time, with neither partner being the dominant one; in these situations violence, although mild, often seemed to have an instrumental motivation. In contrast, there were couples in which violence tended to erupt during conflict cycles that got out of control; here violence was most often expressive in nature. Emotional abuse, like physical abuse, had both an expressive and instrumental motivation, and was often the primary means of exerting a general pattern of control in the relationship.	Analytic induction using couple typology

86.	Roberts, A.R. <b>2006</b>  Article	A five-level classificatory schema detailing the duration and severity of woman battering.	In-depth interviews with 501 battered women. 4 sub-samples: 1) battered women imprisoned for killing their partners; women from police departments; women from shelters; a convenience sample of previously abused women	Provides a new classification typology: short-term victims, intermediate, intermittent / long term, chronic and severe with a regular pattern, and homicidal.	Thematic content analysis
87.	Kierrynn, D.; Taylor, B. <b>2006</b>  Article	The unexpected outcomes of a research project that explored the informal support needs of women leaving abusive relationships.	Interviews with 26 Australian women living in a rural area	The participants revealed an inner and outer journey of recovery; a journey with self was also a journey with others. The feminist approach used in this study empowered women to acknowledge their abuse, resist the effects of that abuse, and begin their journeys of recovery. The feminist processes which were aimed at giving centrality to women's experiences, subjectivity and authenticity, also facilitated processes of healing and transformation for the participants.	Thematic content analysis  Feminist research design
88.	Morrison, K.E.; Luchok, K.J.; Richter, D.L.; Parra-Medina, D. <b>2006</b>  Article	The challenges African-American women in abusive relationships face when they consider seeking help from informal networks.	Semi-structured interviews with 15 African-American women	Participants perceived their informal networks as willing to offer instrumental support (i.e. tangible assistance); family and friends were forthcoming with certain aid and services such as child care, transportation and shelter. However, informal networks were not always emotionally supportive. The stigma and anticipated judgemental response to being a victimised African-American woman was a hindrance to help-seeking among participants.	Thematic content analysis
89.	Leisenring, A. <b>2006</b>  Article	How battered women both draw from and reject victim discourses in their processes of self-construction and self-representation.	Narrative and semi-structured interviewing with 40 women with prior involvement with the court system as a result of domestic violence  21-58 years (mean age 32 years)	Available 'victim' discourses are both enabling and constraining for women who have experienced violence from an intimate partner.  Four common representations of a victim were identified as having the most influence on a women's identity work: as someone who suffers a harm she cannot control; as someone who deserves sympathy and/or social action and support; as someone who is responsible and culpable for her experiences; and as someone who is weak, passive and powerless. Women used both 'victim empowerment' and 'survivor' discourses to understand and make sense of themselves and their	Grounded theory  Narrative framework

				<p>experiences.</p> <p>In their attempts to construct self-identities, battered women become caught between notions of victimisation, agency and responsibility.</p>	
90.	<p>Power, C.; Kralik, D.; Koch, T.; Jackson, D. <b>2006</b></p> <p>Article</p>	<p>The ways in which women negotiate their identities in the discourses of femininity.</p>	<p>Individual interviews with 20 Australian women ranging in age from early twenties to mid sixties</p>	<p>The women revealed that cues for IPV were present early in the relationship, but were not recognised at the time. Early cues / behaviours were rationalised and reconstructed in order to make it more acceptable. Two positions within the discourse of romantic love were identified that underpinned women's desires to establish and invest in the relationship despite the presence of IPV; these were 'desperate for a man' and interpreting jealousy as a sign of love.</p>	<p>Discourse analysis</p> <p>Feminist poststructuralist framework</p>
91.	<p>Cluss, P.A.; Chang, J.C.; Hawker, L.; Hudson Scholle, S.; Dado, D.; Buranosky, R.; Goldstrohm, S. <b>2006</b></p> <p>Article</p>	<p>Potential models of change for IPV: process of safety-seeking behaviour change, and the fit of the TTM for explaining this process.</p>	<p>Semi-structured individual interviews with 20 women self-identified as IPV victims</p> <p>22-62 years (mean age 45 years)</p> <p>Recruited from a local domestic violence shelter, a large specialty women's hospital, and a general internal medicine clinic; and direct recruitment by health care clinicians</p>	<p>The authors propose the psychosocial readiness model to describe the process of change for female victims of IPV. This model considers readiness as a continuum that ranges from robustly defending the status quo on one end, to being ready to take action towards change on the other. It allows for a complex understanding of the processes that enhance and inhibit positive change for victims. Movement toward and away from change along the continuum results from a dynamic interplay of both internal factors (awareness, perceived support and self-efficacy or perceived power) and external interpersonal and situational factors.</p>	<p>Grounded theory approach</p>
92.	<p>Chang, J.C.; Dado, D.; Ashton, S.; Hawker, L.; Cluss, P.A.; Buranosky, R.; Scholle, S.H. <b>2006</b></p> <p>Article</p>	<p>Potential models of change for IPV: process of safety-seeking behaviour change, and the fit of the TTM for explaining this process.</p>	<p>Semi-structured individual interviews with 20 women self-identified as IPV victims</p> <p>22-62 years (mean age 45 years); Recruited from a local domestic violence shelter, a large specialty women's hospital, and a general internal medicine clinic; and direct recruitment by health care clinicians</p>	<p>The women in this study: 1) moved through stages of readiness generally in a non-linear fashion, with varying rates of progression between safe and non-safe situations; 2) were able to identify a "turning point" in their situations; 3) attempted multiple "action" steps; and 4) were influenced by internal and external factors.</p> <p>The authors furthermore found that codes based on the TTM were not adequate in fully capturing the experiences of their participants.</p>	<p>Content analysis (coding/ mapping approach)</p>

93.	Sears, H.A.; Byers, E.S.; Whelan, J.J.; Saint-Pierre, M. <b>2006</b>  Article	Adolescents' ideas about girls' and boys' use and experience of physical and psychological abuse in heterosexual dating relationships.	Single gender focus groups with English and French Canadian high school students in Grades 9 and 11	Eight themes emerged: 1) Youths define behaviours as abusive only in specific contexts; 2) Boys define abuse by its intent; girls define abuse by its impact; 3) Boys use more physical abuse and girls use more psychological abuse; 4) Youths perceive a double standard associated with boys' versus girls' use of physical violence; 5) Psychological abuse reflects a struggle for control; 6) Physical and psychological abuse are connected; 7) Embarrassment prevents teens from disclosing dating violence; and 8) Adolescents want skills to have healthy relationships.	Thematic content analysis
94.	Downs, W.R.; Rindels, B.; Atkinson, C. <b>2007</b>  Article	Women's Use of Physical and Nonphysical Self-Defense Strategies During Incidents of Partner Violence.	Semi-structured interviews with 447 American women (18 years and older) from 7 domestic violence programs and 5 substance use disorder treatment programs	Women developed numerous strategies aimed at protecting themselves from IPV. Non-physical means included running away, locking herself in another room, calling or threatening to call others for help, talking to her partner with the intent of motivating him to stop the violence, and compliance with what she perceived to be her partner's wishes. In some incidents, women described fighting back (slapping, hitting, kicking or threatening to hit her partner). Male partners usually responded to women's use of violence with even greater violence, thus most women preferred using non-violent strategies.	Content analysis (open coding)
95.	Ismail, F.; Berman, H.; Ward-Griffin, C. <b>2007</b>  Article	Dating Violence and the Health of Young Women.	2 Focus groups; 3 individual interviews with 11 English-speaking Canadian girls and young women.  17-23 years	Four central themes emerged: <i>manipulation and control</i> in the context of dating relationships; <i>broader contexts</i> that shape dating violence in young women's lives; <i>health perspectives</i> and experiences; and normalisation, perpetuation and trivialisation of <i>dating violence</i> .  The young women described pressures from their peers and the media to have boyfriends and develop committed relationships at a young age. Young women were willing to tolerate violence in a desperate attempt to hold on to their romantic notions about relationships.	Feminist analysis
96.	Anderson, K.M.; Danis, F.S. <b>2007</b>	The informal and formal helping strategies of female college sorority members.	4 Focus groups with 35 undergraduate women  19-24 years (mean age 20.7 years)	Participants identified a barrier of silence, and still associated stigma and embarrassment with the subject. The study identified a lack of knowledge, experience and intervention regarding the issue of relationship violence as it applies to college sororities.	Thematic content analysis (focus groups)

	Article			Although participants felt it was more likely that informal helping strategies would be used before approaching more formal services, leaders within the informal network of sororities did not express having the comfort, knowledge or skill levels to address the issue.	
97.	Logan, T.K.; Cole, J.; Shannon, L. <b>2007</b>  Article	The similarities and differences in non-physically forced sexually coercive and sexually degrading tactics experienced by women who do and women who do not report forced sex by a violent partner.	Quantitative scale measurements; open-ended questions with 31 women who do and 31 women who do not report forced sex  20-62 years (mean age 37 years)	Themes that emerged from both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that many women in violent relationships, regardless of whether they report forced sex, are not comfortable with the sexual component of the relationship for several reasons: the selfishness of their partner; sex had become a chore; and women recognised that their partner used sex as another way to control them or as an attempt to make up with them after fighting.  Violent partners use a range of non-physically forced sexual coercion and degradation tactics to gain access to sex, including verbal manipulation, verbal pressure, substance use, and implicit threats/force. Women from both groups in this study perceived their experiences of sexual abuse to have been deliberately designed for the purpose of humiliating and degrading them – suggesting that sexual abuse should not be considered in a vacuum, but must be seen in the context of controlling, degrading and humiliating tactics.	Content analysis of open-ended questions; Nvivo software
98.	Fox, A.M.; Jackson, S.S.; Hansen, N.B.; Gasa, N.; Crewe, M.; Sikkema, K.J. <b>2007</b>  Article	The intersections of risk for intimate partner violence and HIV infection in South Africa.	Semi-structured interviews with 18 black women seeking services for relationship violence	Violence and threats of violence prohibited most of the women from adopting key HIV risk reduction techniques such as abstaining from sex, limiting their number of sexual partners, and using condoms. In addition, for many women, attempts at safer sex negotiation served to prompt further violence and abuse leading to a reciprocal relationship between risk for abuse and HIV.  For most of the women, psychological and emotional abuse, such as threats of leaving the relationship or seeking out other partners, created a climate of control that made it difficult for women to challenge their partners or sometimes made them submit to risky sex.	Thematic content analysis



99.	Berna, N. Schweingruber, D. <b>2007</b>  Article	How people evaluate and use different sources of information in their understandings of domestic violence.	Interviews with 20 people (11 women; 9 men) randomly selected from non-academic staff at an American university	<p>In not having to explain lived experience, non-victims found it easier to use common formula stories to develop clearer and more robust (but not necessarily better) narratives.</p> <p>Non-victims explained many reasons for why victims stay. They described victims as lacking personal qualities that might otherwise allow them to prevent the abuse; and they focused on the victim significantly more than on the abuser. In contrast, victims with firsthand experience of abuse used a variety of sources in thinking about domestic violence; they challenged the cultural scripts about why victims stay in order to illustrate the complexity of their narratives.</p>	Narrative analysis
100.	Foshee, V.A.; Bauman, K.E.; Linder, F.; Rice, J.; Wilcher, R. <b>2007</b>  Article	Typologies of dating violence perpetrated by adolescents.	<p>In-depth interviews with 116 girls and boys (ages 17 or 18 years) previously identified by an acts scale as perpetrators of dating violence</p> <p>Participants were selected from respondents in the Safe Date study, which was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of an adolescent dating violence prevention programme</p>	<p>The authors identified four types of female perpetration that were distinguished by motives, precipitating events, and the abuse history of the partners. One type of perpetration accounted for most acts by boys.</p> <p>The most common female type of violence perpetration was labelled as “patriarchal terrorism response”. In these cases, girls reported using violence in order to defend against a boyfriend who had systematically tried to control her for some time with physical and psychological abuse.</p> <p>The next two most common female types of violence were motivated by anger and a sense of wrongdoing on the part of the boyfriend. Overall, more than half of violent acts reported by adolescent girls were described as acts done in response to violence initiated by the boyfriend.</p> <p>For boys, most of the acts were classified as “escalation prevention”: violence to prevent the escalation of female physical fighting. In more than half of the cases, the boy explained that the girl used violence or acted like she was going to use violence because he had cheated on her or because she was jealous of another girl.</p>	Content analysis (coding/typologies)

101.	Yick, A.G. <b>2008</b> Article  <b>Review</b>	The role of spirituality and religiosity among culturally diverse domestic violence survivors.	A review and metasynthesis of thematic findings from eight qualitative articles.	Six qualitative studies (8 articles) were identified in the review. Nine overarching themes were derived across studies: strength and resilience; tension stemming from religious definition of family; tension stemming from religious definition of gender role expectations; spiritual vacuum; reconstruction; recouping spirit and self; new interpretations of submission; forgiveness as healing; and giving back.	Metasynthesis of thematic content across studies
102.	Flinck, A.; Astedt-Kurki, P.; Paavilainen, E. <b>2008</b>  Article	Intimate partner violence as experienced by men.	Two open-ended interviews with 10 men aged 36-56 years (all but one man were Finns).	The experiences of men formulated three main themes describing factors leading to IPV, being a victim of IPV and their own violence. The main themes were: a burden on the pair relationship; face to face with violence; and from denying violence to striving towards the truth.	Descriptive thematic content analysis  Existential-phenomenology
103.	Enander, V.; Holmberg, C. <b>2008</b>  Article	The leaving process(es) of battered women.	In-depth interviews with 10 Swedish women (24-57 years) who had left violent heterosexual relationships.  Women were recruited from shelters, and were interviewed over a three-year period.	Three overlapping leaving processes are described: 'Breaking Up' covers action (the physical break-up), and the turning point by which it is preceded or with which it coincides; 'Becoming Free' covers emotion and involves release from strong emotional bonds to the batterer; 'Understanding' covers cognition, and is a process through which the woman perceives and interprets what she has been subjected to as violence and herself as a battered woman.	Thematic content analysis  Theoretical fields: men's violence against women and exit processes
104.	Copel, L.C. <b>2008</b>  Article	The lived experience of women in abusive relationships who sought spiritual guidance.	Open-ended interviews with 16 American women (mean age of 42 years) who had experienced IPV and spiritual distress.	Clergy were not helpful in alleviating women's spiritual distress of intervening in the violence. Four themes that epitomised the negative outcomes of the help-seeking behaviour were spiritual suffering, devaluation, loss and powerlessness.	Thematic content analysis  Phenomenology
105.	Winstok, Z.; Eisikovits, Z. <b>2008</b>  Article	The formation, development and termination of interpersonal conflicts in intimate relationships	In-depth qualitative interviews with 25 men cohabiting couples in northern Israel where the men have used physical violence against the women.	Two aspects of escalatory conflict wherein aggression was perpetrated emerged in the analysis: motive and control. The authors emphasise the importance of both research and practice to focus on escalation rather than aggression, and views aggression as its expression.	Structured content analysis  Grounded theory

106.	Chung, D. <b>2008</b>  Article	How young women (with and without experiences of violence) understand and make meaning of dating and dating violence.	Semi-structured interviews with 25 young Australian women (aged 14 to 18 years).	Dating relationships were part of the young women's performance of heterosexual femininity. Young women therefore felt pressured to be in dating relationships.  Being part of a couple leads to an interdependence of identities that result in women bearing responsibility for their partners' behaviour to protect their own identity and reputation.  Women draw on individualistic discourses in explaining dating violence, and focus on women's reasons for staying in violent relationships.	Thematic content analysis/Discourse analysis  Feminist framework
107.	Allison, C.J.; Bartholomew, K.; Mayseless, O.; Dutton, D.G. <b>2008</b>  Article	Attachment and relationship dynamics in couples identified for male partner violence.	Separate in-depth interviews with both members of 23 heterosexual couples identified for male violence in Australia. The men's mean age was 34.13 years; the women's mean age was 33.70 years	Two strategies for regulating emotional and physical proximity within these relationships were identified: pursuit and distancing. Partners' abusive acts appeared to serve one of these attachment strategies – highlighting the relational basis of intimate violence.	Thematic analysis/ Grounded theory
108.	Boonzaier, F. <b>2008</b>  Article	The Relational Construction of Woman Abuse – how women and men in intimate relationships attribute meaning to the man's perpetration of violence against the woman.	Narrative interviews with 25 South African heterosexual couples identified for male violence (women and men were interviewed separately).  28-48 years (mean age 37 years)	Participants' narratives of self, other, relationship and violence included ambiguous constructions of victims and perpetrators; constructions of violent relationships as cyclical in nature; constructions of woman abuse as a problem of self; narrations of violence as a mutual endeavour and all-encompassing narratives of power and control.  This study provides insight into the subjective, relational and gendered dynamics of abusive relationships, and illustrates the significance of context in shaping ways in which experience are narrated.	Narrative analysis (analysis of form, content and functions of narratives)  Attention to language and discourse  Feminist poststructuralism
109.	Oke, M. <b>2008</b>  Article	The value of narrative in understanding Mongolian and Australian women's journeys of survival, recovery and remaking of self, through and beyond IPV	11 Mongolian (age range 23-47 years) and 11 Australian women (age range 30-47 years).	There are some deep commonalities and similarities between the experiences of Mongolian and Australian women. Most of the women focused on personal or identity change as a main theme or plot of their story without being asked.	Narrative analysis  Feminist and cross-cultural frameworks

				<p>In both cases the women's experiences of violence were emotional and embodied, taking place in patriarchal cultural contexts. In both cases, recovery involved reconnecting within themselves and with others, rejecting old patriarchal beliefs. Traditional canonical narratives were replaced with feminist understandings which underpinned their new strengthened narrative identities. Power and agency were crucial aspects of the women's stronger narrative identities.</p> <p>Feminist, qualitative, cross-cultural and narrative research methods and analysis may work across cultures to aid in the understanding of women's experiences of survival, recovery and remaking of self following domestic violence.</p>	
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**TABLE 2: QUALITATIVE STUDIES CONDUCTED WITH UNIVERSITY POPULATIONS**

	<b>Author, date and type of publication</b>	<b>Object under investigation</b>	<b>Data collection methods and Sample details</b> <b>Age range</b>	<b>Methodological/ Analytical approach</b> <b>Theoretical paradigm</b>
1	Mahlstedt, D. & Keeny, L. <b>1993</b>  Article	How young adult female survivors of dating violence involved members of their social network in the experience of abuse.	Questionnaire data from 130 female university students  18-31 years (mean age 21 years)	Statistical / content analysis
2	Wood, J.T. <b>2001</b>  Article	How women narrate themselves and their partners' violence.  The role of culturally endorsed gender and romance narratives in normalising violence.	Interviews with 20 women from university classes  20-53 years; ages at the time they were involved in the violent relationships ranged from 14 to 32 years	Grounded theory  "Narrative work" premises
3	Few, A.L. & Bell-Scott, P. <b>2002</b>  Article	The decision-making processes and coping strategies of Black college women in terminating psychologically abusive dating relationships.	Semi-structured interviews with 6 Black single women enrolled in a south-eastern university  18-30 years	Grounded theory  Black feminist approach
4	Few, A.L. & Rosen, K.H. <b>2005</b>  Article	How women's vulnerabilities link to their decisions to stay in abusive relationships.	Secondary analysis of semi-structured interviews with 28 young women in dating relationships from two rural south-eastern universities  Mean age 22 years	Content analysis- informed by a conceptual model
5	Berkel, L.A.; Furlong, A.N.; Hickman, A.A. & Blue, E.L. <b>2005</b>  Article	Black women's beliefs about abusive relationships.	Open-ended questionnaires with a convenience sample of 64 Black female students recruited from a small historically Black Christian college in the South	Content analysis  Open ended questionnaires

6	Frederick Amar, A.; Alexy, E.M. <b>2005</b>  Article	The impact of the experience of dating violence on the daily lives of college women.	Open-ended questionnaire with 210 American female college women  18-25 years (mean age 19.3 years)	Thematic content analysis
7	Anderson, K.M.; Danis, F.S. <b>2007</b>  Article	The informal and formal helping strategies of female college sorority members.	4 Focus groups with 35 undergraduate women  19-24 years (mean age 20.7 years)	Thematic content analysis

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**TABLE 3: QUALITATIVE STUDIES USING NARRATIVE ELEMENTS IN THEIR METHODOLOGICAL/ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

	<b>Author, date and type of publication</b>	<b>Object under investigation</b>	<b>Data collection methods and Sample details</b>  <b>Age range</b>	<b>Methodological/ Analytical approach</b>  <b>Theoretical paradigm</b>
1	Lempert, L.B. <b>1994</b>  Article	How one woman tells the story of her lived experiences of violence and her transformation of self within a violent intimate relationship.	In-depth interview with 1 woman (Jane) from a drop-in centre support group for women who had experienced IPV	Narrative analysis of the structure and sequence of talk
2	Lempert, L.B. <b>1997</b>  Article	The informal help-seeking overtures of women in abusive relationships, and the unintended consequences of these overtures.	In-depth interviews with 32 women self-selected from outreach support groups	Grounded theory  Some attention paid to narrative structure
3	Stevens, P.E., Richards, D.J. <b>1998</b>  Article	A narrative case analysis of HIV infection in a battered woman	Single case study of one woman taken from a larger feminist study of 20 women's experiences living with HIV/AIDS in the US	Instrumental case study
4	Belknap, R.A. <b>1999</b>  Article	Decisions experienced as moral conflicts by women who have experienced abuse by an intimate partner.	Semi-structured interviews with 18 American rural women in a Midwestern state  25-51 years	Narrative analysis  Theoretical framework of moral development.
5	Hydén, M. <b>1999</b>  Article	The psychological process of breaking up from an abusive husband; the ways in which women account for the decision to leave.	Interviews with 10 women (over a two year period) who sought refuge at a shelter for battered women in Stockholm, Sweden, after leaving their abusive husband  25-41 years	Narrative content analysis  Foucault's conceptualisation of power

6	Belknap, R.A. <b>2000</b>  Article	One Woman's Life Viewed Through the Interpretive Lens of Gilligan's Theory (1982).	Single case study of one Mexican American woman (27 years) who experienced IPV during adolescence	Narrative analysis  Reading for conflict and voice in narratives  Positional and textual reflexivity
7	Hammock, A.C. <b>2000</b>  Article	The figurative language (similes and metaphors) used by battered women at different points of group therapy.	In-depth interviews with 12 women from a battered women's support centre in Colima, Mexico  25-45 years	Structural word analysis
8	Towns, A. & Adams, P. <b>2000</b>  Article	The discourses women employ to explain their understandings of love and violence, and to prevent them from acting against the man's violence.	Interviews with 20 women from support groups for women who had experienced IPV, and who lived in a large New Zealand city	Discourse analysis  Feminist poststructuralism
9	Ellsberg, M.; Peña, R.; Herrera, A.; Liljestrand, J. & Winkvist, A. <b>2000</b>  Article	The magnitude, characteristics, circumstances and experiences of intimate partner abuse in León, Nicaragua.	A survey with a representative sample of 488 women between the ages of 15-49 in León, Nicaragua  Interviews with 2 women	Narrative analysis using an ecological model
10	Jackson, S. <b>2001</b>  Article	Occurrence of the popular, idealised romantic narrative in young women's stories of IPV relationships.	Interviews with 24 older adolescents / high school students  16-18 years	Narrative analysis  Feminist post-structuralist framework
11	Wood, J.T. <b>2001</b>  Article	How women narrate themselves and their partners' violence.  The role of culturally endorsed gender and romance narratives in normalising violence.	Interviews with 20 women from university classes  20-53 years; ages at the time they were involved in the violent relationships ranged from 14 to 32 years	Grounded theory  "Narrative work" premises



12	Loseke, D.R. <b>2001</b>  Book chapter	How formula stories shape the experience of women who participate in battered women's support groups.	4 support groups and 10 consecutive weekly meetings held in a shelter for battered women	Narrative analysis
13	Eisikovits, Z. & Winstok, Z. <b>2002</b>  Article	The structure and content of recollections of violent events among cohabiting partners who remain together in spite of the violence.	Separate in-depth interviews with 24 couples identified through social service agencies and municipal police departments in northern Ireland	Attention to structure and language
14	Carter, S. <b>2002</b>  Article	The author's personal account of spousal abuse and how it compares to academic discourses.	Diaries and reminiscences of 1 woman (the author herself)	The influence of subject-position on language and meaning-making
15	Cavanagh, K. <b>2003</b>  Article	Understanding Women's Responses to Domestic Violence.	In-depth structured interviews with 136 women  18-57 years  Data was drawn from The Violent Men Study- a longitudinal and comparative evaluation of two Scottish programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence	Content analysis  Contextual and interactional framework  Social-constructivist and power elements of language acknowledged
16	Boonzaier, F. & De La Rey, C. <b>2003</b>  Article	How women's reconstructions of violence either resist or sanction hegemonic gendered norms.	Narrative interviews with 15 women recruited through advertisements in Mitchell's Plain, South Africa  30-52 years	Discourse/ narrative analysis  Feminist post-structuralism
17	Tolman, D.L., Spencer, R., Rosen-Reynoso, M. & Porche, M.V. <b>2003</b>	Early adolescent girls' and boys' descriptions of their early romantic heterosexual relationships.	Two samples (combined n=100) of early adolescents <i>Study 1:</i> Survey and interviews with 72 students (46 girls and 26 boys) chosen from among the participants in a longitudinal study on sexual health in a North-eastern sub/urban middle school	Thematic content analysis  Listening Guide method of narrative analysis  Feminist perspective

	Article		<i>Study 2:</i> 6 focus groups conducted during a six month workshop with a sample of 28 girls who were enrolled in an after-school program run by a grassroots feminist organisation. The majority of the girls were early adolescents, although the ages ranged from 11 to 19. Most were African American or Latina	
18	Gadd, D. <b>2004</b>  Article	The intersubjective dynamics between interviewer and interviewee in a narrative of intimate partner violence.	Re-analysis of interview with 1 male participant	Constitutive role of interviewer  Use of positional reflexivity in opening up alternative readings of data
19	Horrill, K.E. & Berman, H. <b>2004</b>  Report	Issues that surround a woman's ability to remain out of an abusive relationship.	Open-ended interviews with 10 women in Canada	Feminist narrative inquiry  Content analysis
20	Enosh, G. & Buchbinder, E. <b>2005</b>  Article	The co-construction of narrative styles of domestic violence as transacted between interviewer and interviewee.	Re-analysis of separate interviews with 20 cohabiting couples in large urban area in northern Israel- who had reported at least one incident of violence to social service and police departments during the year prior to data collection	Power relationships in interviews  Constitutive role of interviewer
21	Enosh, G. & Buchbinder, E. <b>2005</b>  Article	The reconstruction of memory of participants in domestic violence.	Re-analysis of separate interviews with 20 cohabiting couples drawn from a larger study of violence against women conducted in northern Israel. Couples had reported at least one incident of violence to social service and police departments in a large urban area in northern Israel during the year prior to data collection  Men ranged in age between 21-51 years (M=33); women between 21-43 years (M=30)	Narrative conceptualisation of memory  Thematic and conversational discourse analysis  Reflexivity regarding the context and constitutive role of interviewer
22	Hydén, M. <b>2005</b>  Article	The relationships between power, responsibility and activity as reflected in the various ways battered women positioned themselves in their narratives of leaving.	Interviews with 10 women (over a 2 year period) who sought refuge at a shelter for battered women in Stockholm, Sweden, after leaving their abusive husband; 25-41 years	Narrative analysis

23	Chung, D. <b>2005</b>  Article	The micro-practices of heterosexuality in young people's relationships.	Interview schedules with 40 young people (25 females, 15 males) who were recruited from secondary schools and youth services in Australia  15-19 years (mean age 17 years)	Discourse analysis
24	Leisenring, A. <b>2006</b>  Article	How battered women both draw from and reject victim discourses in their processes of self-construction and self-representation.	Narrative and semi-structured interviewing with 40 women with prior involvement with the court system as a result of domestic violence  21-58 years (mean age 32 years)	Grounded theory  Narrative framework
25	Berns, N. Schweingruber, D. <b>2007</b>  Article	How people evaluate and use different sources of information in their understandings of domestic violence.	Interviews with 20 people (11 women; 9 men) randomly selected from non-academic staff at an American university	Narrative analysis
26	Oke, M. <b>2008</b>  Article	The value of narrative in understanding Mongolian and Australian women's journeys of survival, recovery and remaking of self, through and beyond domestic violence.	11 Mongolian (age range 23-47 years) and 11 Australian women (age range 30-47 years).	Narrative conceptualisation of identity  Feminist and cross-cultural frameworks
27	Boonzaier, F. <b>2008</b>  Article	The Relational Construction of Woman Abuse – how women and men in intimate relationships attribute meaning to the man's perpetration of violence against the woman.	Narrative interviews with 25 South African heterosexual couples identified for male violence (women and men were interviewed separately).  28-48 years (mean age 37 years)	Narrative analysis (analysis of form, content and functions of narratives); Attention to language and discourse  Feminist poststructuralism

**APPENDIX C****STUDENT HANDOUT**

Dear student

**PARTICIPATION IN GROUP DISCUSSION and/or INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW**

The study in which you are asked to participate is conducted by a clinical psychologist working in the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at the University of Cape Town. The study is aimed at better understanding how young people view, experience and talk about intimate / 'romantic' relationships, i.e. relationships with a current or ex-boyfriend or -girlfriend. Previous research, both in South Africa and across the world, has shown that some young women and men might be experiencing some form of harm in their romantic relationships. More needs to be known about what young people know-, and how they feel and talk-, about intimate relationships in order to find better ways of helping those who experience harm from their dating partners.

You are invited to participate in a GROUP DISCUSSION and/or an INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW. The group will comprise no more than 6-8 students of the same gender, and will be one and a half hours long. It will take place on an afternoon that doesn't interfere with your academic duties. Refreshments will be made available. The individual interview will take place on a morning or afternoon that suits you, and will involve you talking alone about your experiences of your current or past intimate relationships.

You can choose how you would prefer to participate. For example, should you not feel comfortable participating in a small group discussion, but feel that you would benefit from telling your story in an individual interview, you can choose to only take part in an individual interview.

All information will be treated as confidential (i.e. no one except the research investigator will have access to the information). Your names will not appear on any documents, and no one will be told about how you participated in the group/interview. The group discussions and interviews will be audio-taped, and the tapes will be erased after they have been used to help gather all the information.

Should you wish to be considered for participation in the group discussion and/or interview, please complete the form that is attached to this letter, or contact Ms Adele Marais directly at

404-2164; 404-6257; [amarais@curie.uct.ac.za](mailto:amarais@curie.uct.ac.za). Please also feel free to contact Adele Marais if you have any questions about the research.

Thank you for your interest.

Kind regards,

ADELE MARAIS

Clinical Psychologist

Primary researcher of study

PROF ALAN J. FLISHER

Professor of Psychiatry and Mental health

Supervisor

University of Cape Town

**PARTICIPATION IN GROUP DISCUSSION**

Please tick one of the following:

YES

Yes, I would like to participate in the group discussion.

NO

No, I do not want to participate in the group discussion.

**PARTICIPATION IN INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW**

Please tick one of the following:

YES

Yes, I would like to participate in an individual interview.

NO

No, I do not want to participate in an individual interview.

INTERVIEW ONLY

I do not want to participate in a group discussion, but would like to participate in an individual interview.

If you answered YES to any of the above, please complete the following:

Name: .....

Age: .....

Gender:

MALE

FEMALE

Contact numbers: .....

Email address: .....

Which times would suit you to attend a group discussion/ interview?

.....  
.....

## APPENDIX D

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, ..... (name) hereby confirm as follows:

1). I was invited to participate in an in-depth individual interview/focus group as part of the University of Cape Town's study looking at intimate relationships of young people.

2). The following aspects have been explained to me:

- **Aim:** The aim of the study is to better understand intimate partner violence in adolescent relationships. The individual interview with me will focus on my own personal experiences of relationships and/or abuse in my current or previous relationship with my boyfriend / girlfriend.
- **Procedures:** The interview will take place in a private room. The interview will be one to one and a half hours long, and will revolve around what I choose to talk about. The interview will be audio-taped. This recording will be erased at the end of the study.
- **Confidentiality:** All information from this interview will be treated as confidential. My name will not appear in any reports. No one at my university or home will be told about my participation in the individual interview.
- **Voluntary participation:** My participation is voluntary. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participate and I understand that I can refuse to talk about anything that I do not feel comfortable or safe to talk about. I also understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time.
- **Help after the interview:** If necessary, I know that appropriate action and counselling options can be discussed with me after the interview. Should I feel upset during or after this interview, the researcher will assist me in getting support.

3). The above information was explained to me by Ms Adele Marais, and I had the opportunity to ask questions, and feel satisfied with all the answers.

4) I understand that at any time during the study, I can contact Ms Adele Marais at 404-6257; 0826503301.

I HEREBY VOLUNTEER AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP.

Signed at .....(place) on  
..... (date).

.....

Signature of participant

University of Cape Town